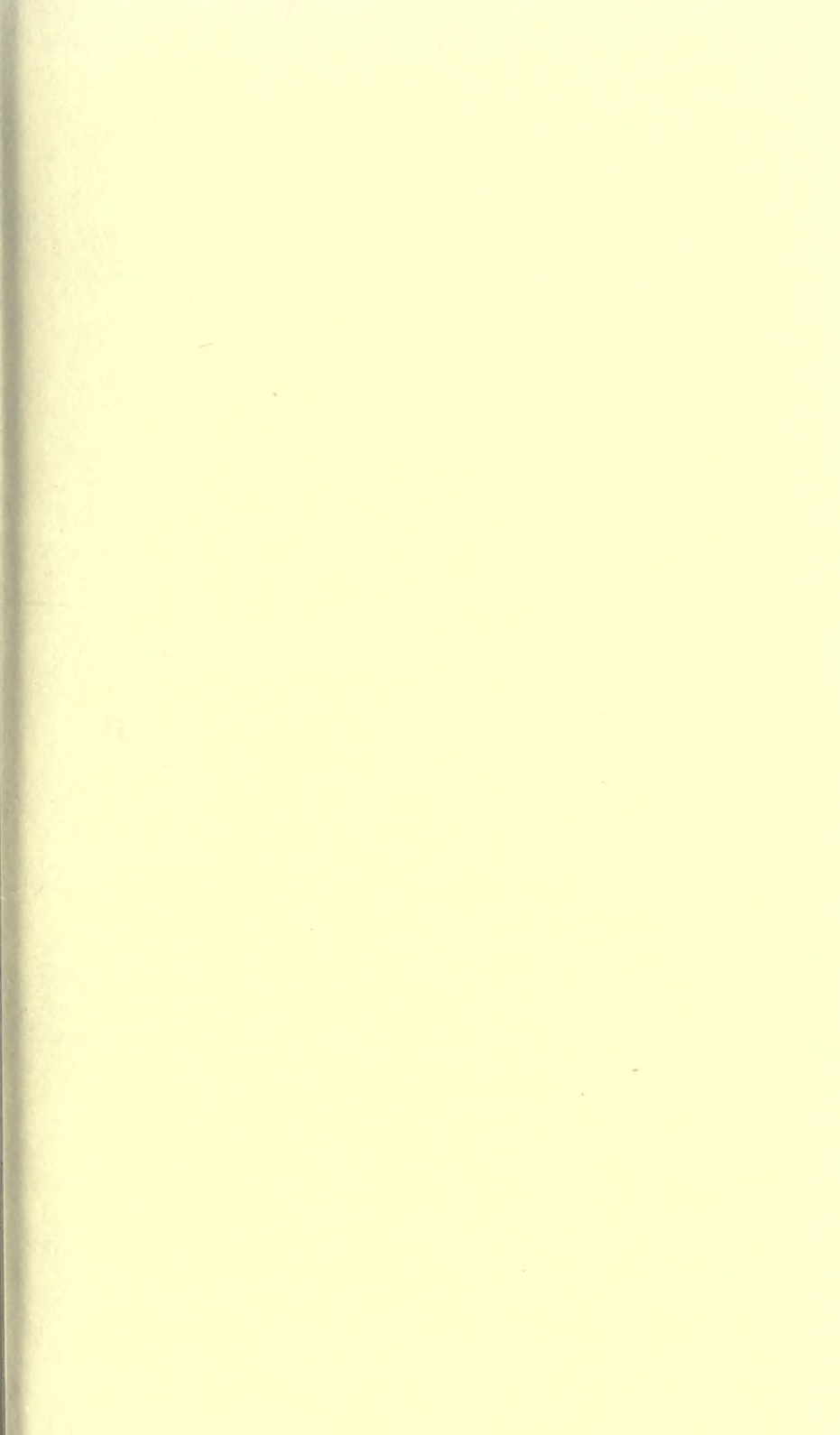


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# A BOOK ABOUT AUTHORS

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REFLECTIONS & RECOLLECTIONS  
OF A BOOK-WRIGHT

*Scott Robert*  
By  
A. R. HOPE MONCRIEFF



ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK  
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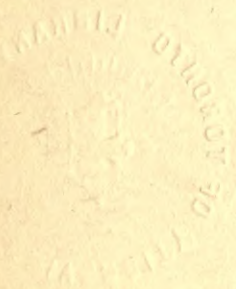


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## PREFACE

I HAD thought of modestly styling this a *Book about Bookmakers*; but that word has unworthy associations, and the Society of Authors licenses us all to take a higher title. One remembers the Rouen judge's dictum to Dumas when he scrupled to style himself a dramatist in the city of the great Corneille—*Il-y-a des degrés, M. Dumas!* And indeed what I have in mind in the following pages is that, where they are not mere makers of books, great and small authors differ from one another in degree rather than in kind.

In the teeth of what has been said in his first chapter against inviting the public inside an author's door, the present writer is here fain to obtrude a personal apology. Through illness, his book had to be hurried to the press somewhat "unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled"; and the first proofs came to be corrected on a painful sick-bed, without access to works of reference. For what crossing of *t*'s and dotting of *i*'s may appear deficient, then, his fellow book-wrights will be able to make allowance. That all its imperfections are not still upon its head, he has to thank the care of a friend, to whose manifold helpfulness, at a time of need, he owes more than words can acknowledge.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I	
INTRODUCTION—THE AUTHOR . . . . .	1
II	
A SHORT HISTORY OF AUTHORS . . . . .	14
III	
THE ANATOMY OF AUTHORS . . . . .	43
IV	
AN APOLOGY FOR AUTHORS . . . . .	78
V	
THE AUTHOR'S APPRENTICESHIP . . . . .	123
VI	
THE TRADE OF AUTHOR . . . . .	153
VII	
PUBLISHERS . . . . .	187
VIII	
EDITORS . . . . .	224
IX	
CRITICS . . . . .	250
X	
READERS . . . . .	276





# I

## INTRODUCTION—THE AUTHOR

THERE is a fashion in our days for authors, like other persons dependent on the favour of the public, to court its interest by posing before the cameras of its curiosity. The catalogues of their works are headed by simpering or studiously reflective portraits; their addresses, clubs, recreations are communicated in works of reference; interviewers are made welcome in their homes; and flattering biographies of them, while still living, are taken for a seal of distinction. With this fashion the present writer is out of sympathy, holding that the humblest craftsman has a right to keep his life private, at least to put up the shutters after business hours. Yet for once he must take leave to speak frankly about himself, by way of proving his title to speak of other authors.

In these pages, the reader's humble servant celebrates his jubilee as a maker of books. It is more than half a century, indeed, since he first got into print, to wit, with some verses hailing the volunteer movement, which were recommended to a well-known newspaper by their topical interest. At a very early age he took to scribbling like a duck to water; and most of us ducklings, whether or no we turn out swans in the end, are apt to begin by quacking in rhyme. There are

many who might confess like myself to wasting paper before they got into their teens. Before I was out of them I had written and made money by a real book, published without my real name, as now I am glad to think—"look on't again I dare not!" Still earlier came my first "honorarium" in shape of permission to make toffee for the whole house, an admiring schoolmaster's reward for a description of a school picnic, sweet reminiscence that brings me almost to a diamond jubilee of authorship.

Success fell to me too soon on this precocious career. I had not, like many authorlings, to serve seven years for the Leah of publication, and seven more for the Rachel of profit. I was scarcely of age, when I made something of a hit in the literary arena. My turn being for the realistic rather than the romantic, I had soon abandoned imitations of Scott and Byron for prose, and took to writing accounts of school life, as the only life I knew much about. While still at college, I wrote a medley of crude ideas on education and things in general, set forth in the feigned personality of an old schoolmaster. This was partly inspired by a vague dissatisfaction with what had been called my education and by eagerness to unpack my heart of swelling grudges against a world I found ill arranged to my mind ; but its model was suggested by a book that shortly before had brought into note one of the masters at my old school—D'Arcy W. Thompson's *Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster*. The deserved success of this book moved an enterprising publisher who had heard by chance what I was at, to ask for a look at my manuscript, and he published it at his own expense, with a promise of profit to the author, which proved rather a mirage in the cold light of publishing accounts.

So easily I slipped into authorship, and with too flattering result. My *Book about Dominies* was published anonymously as by "a member of the profession," for which the only justification was that, while at Edinburgh University, I had been acting as a sort of tutor under my old schoolmaster, who had conceived a too high opinion of my literary gifts, and by an offer of partnership with himself, encouraged me to think of schoolmastership, when I shrank from what seemed the bonds of the Bar and the Church, professions to a choice of which I had been destined. But I always set my mind on being an author, none the less fixedly for the surprising success of that first serious attempt, and I have never taken to any other craft unless in the way of amateur experiment.

The *Book about Dominies* took with the press and the public; it was well reviewed, went into several editions, and came even to be quoted by grave writers on education, who never quite forgave me when they found out how they had been tricked by a youthful sentimentalist. Soon, indeed, the secret of its authorship began to leak out, which I had sense enough to try to keep bottled up as a chief asset of my effectual imposture. I followed it up with a *Book about Boys*, to which I now affixed the half-transparent pseudonym of "Ascott R. Hope." This book, as far as I can remember, was still more favoured by readers, though some critics took occasion to punish me for having once deceived them.

In this theme, I was still more of an outsider than in the other. I never was a right schoolboy, but passed from an imaginative and sensitive childhood into a precociously reflective hobble-de-hoyhood, driven in upon myself by the contempt of more healthily brutal natures. I made but a tainted



wether of that flock, butted at for being helplessly short-sighted, a crime that brought trouble on me since the days when I got whipped by my nurse as a naughty little story-teller because I denied seeing a landmark well within her range of vision. Withal, on the moral and intellectual world I had long-sighted glimpses that made me pass for mad among thoughtless school-fellows. So my writing with a gush of sympathy about Boys was rather an expression of revolt against the hardness and meanness that pained me in Man : boys were to my blind eyes what the noble savage was to the school of Rousseau. Yet this sentimental philosophastering struck a responsive chord in many hearts, as I learned by sympathetic and appreciative letters from various parts of the English-speaking world ; and I was led on to write stories of school-life that had some vogue in their day, as well as other essays in which like a young colt I took my fling at the world that seemed to me so unsatisfactory.

Well is it for a youth with such dispositions to grow up among those able to direct them, bred, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, among books as a stable-boy among horses. That was not my case, in a home more familiar with horses and dogs, of which I did not so much care to learn. For my sins against the Muses, I may plead "I had no mother and I fell." My father's outlook on the world of books was bounded by the adventures of Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Jorrocks. The only thing like a literary judgment I recall from him was his wonder what people saw in *Adam Bede*, then rising on the literary horizon. At one time, probably moved by well-meant advice, he found fault with my reading so many of the standard novels that chiefly filled his bookshelves, and would have had me apply myself to graver works, but could not particularize



on this head with authority. He did indeed put into my hands some French memoirs which he understood to be historically instructive, among them those of the Count de Grammont and the Duchess d'Abrantès, to the horror of a better informed teacher when I innocently took those works to school as the proper place for such study. Other books of the kind, indeed, I had looked into for myself without being the wiser or the worse for their scandalous implications.

My kind father never quite knew what to make of me, divided between a certain doubtful pride in gifts which he inclined to exaggerate, and distrust of a turn for wandering from the beaten paths of worldly success. The only author I saw at home in the flesh, was held up to me as an awful example of one who had no other means of livelihood than that of writing for papers and magazines ; and intimacy with such a disreputable neighbour was so little encouraged that I cannot even remember his name. My mother having died before I knew her, my father also was taken too soon, leaving me precociously independent. In the family, literary aspirations found little fellowship ; irreverent youngsters jeered, prudent elders frowned or pooh-poohed ; but there was nobody able to guide or control my bent. The schoolmaster, already mentioned, who fostered it more kindly than discreetly, was not a man of high culture, nor did he much succeed in getting me to devote my holiday hours to the study of *Josephus* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* ; he was more fortunate in forcing on my attention Carlyle's *Sartor* and Buckle's *History of Civilization*, that went to colour a somewhat drumly trickle of thought. Not till I had left school, did I fall into the hands of sympathetic and discriminating teachers able to direct my reading, in which the like of me is not very

ready to be directed. As with a good many other idle pupils, I can tell how my true teachers were the books which I read much at random, to stir up one frothy ferment after another in my mind, till by and by it could settle down into something like clearness. In short, almost the whole craft of authorship I had to learn for myself as best I could ; and that is a tale too many of us have to tell.

All this I have written with downcast looks on a cutty-stool of repentance ; but now I stand up to avow something to my own credit. Before the public had done patronizing those green sprouts of fancy, I recognized their insipidity, and strove to root them out like weeds. Having luckily not parted with the copyright of most of them, I was able to withdraw several of my early books from publication, as I did at some expense. As far as I could, I buried them fathoms deep in what I would fain make an ocean of oblivion ; and only to myself in dark hours can the literary wild oats of my youth rise up in rebuke against me. When I can no longer keep their tomb inviolate, cursed be he that thinks it worth while to move those bones !

My slate thus wiped half-clean, I attempted fresh designs with rather more consideration. The picturing of school-life having so far succeeded with me, I cast about for models and methods. I served some terms of hard labour as assistant-master at a school, learning at least as much as I taught. I read everything I could find on the subject ; I made volumes of notes and *mémoires pour servir* ; I studied that phase of human nature in which the evolving savage is rapidly fitted with fetters of civilization ; as an outsider I caught the humorous as well as the moral aspects of youth. Thus better equipped, I wrote

fresh stories of school-life, which I think worth much more than my first ones, while the public that buys such books has not agreed with me. I am not going to argue with the many-headed on its want of appreciation ; but this much, since no one does it for me, I will take leave to boast, that I am not only the most voluminous author in this sort, but the one who has treated the subject most fully from various points of view. Nearly all the rivals who have eclipsed me content themselves, I note, with describing one particular kind of school presumably familiar to them. My study of the matter was more external. Never but once had I in view, and then for a brief glance, the school at which my years were spent. All school life I have taken for my province, as no one else has done, so far as I know. Some of my stories deal with English public schools, a sort of institution in which I have hardly set foot ; but here I had the secret help of a friend,—*selig* !—whose services and influence I must always remember with gratitude. With more first-hand knowledge, I have described the life of grammar-school, as well as of private boarding-schools, the latter, indeed, almost a *terra incognita* to me. Also, I have laid my scene in the humblest class of schools, and among rustic lads ; and would willingly have done so oftener, but for lack of encouragement. In books for this market, anything like liveliness or truth to nature falls flat, other qualities being required by the clerical or official patrons that are the distributors of such wares.

Nor have my yarns been spun out of green hemp alone. I once wrote a novel : it was a very poor one, that rests in peace. I have made notes and studies on the subject, as materials from which I hoped to do better one day, were not life so short and art so long.



Sometimes, in reading the popular success of the hour in this kind, I feel ready to take up again that ambition, which is soon sobered as often as I turn to a novel by Fielding or Scott, by Jane Austen or George Sand, by Spielhagen or Cherbuliez. But indeed it would take a volume as large as this, were I to give an account of all the books I have outlined or planned, enough to fill the working hours of a Methuselah.

While writing books for young readers, I was twisting other strings to my bow, so as by and by to take a shot at the interest of elders. It has been my lot to go a good deal about the world from an early age. After a boyish visit to Paris, my travels began with a cruise in the Mediterranean and a stay in Italy, still heaving from Garibaldi's exploits. A regret I feel in looking back on my life is not having travelled more while I could ; but in fact I have proved immune to the mosquitoes of four continents. At home, too, my short-sightedness drove me from other recreations to the quiet ones of walking, or riding, making observations through spectacles that put me on a level with other men. Such observations I could turn to account by writing on topographical subjects. For one thing, I have edited, that is mainly written, or re-written, some dozens of guide-books, most of them appearing in successive editions. For another, among my literary baggage are geographies used in schools over half the world. Several of my books have been translated into foreign languages ; and nearly a dozen of them are adapted as English reading books in German and Dutch schools. And I have been able to translate other people's writings from half a dozen languages, which I learned for myself, largely in steam-boats, trains and omnibuses, a course of study not recommended by oculists.



My worst enemy, then, could not accuse me of having led an idle life. I shrink from making a census of my productions ; but what with story-books, school-books, picture-books, historical and topographical books and miscellaneous writings, under half a dozen different names, they cannot come far short of two hundred volumes, perhaps above that number, at all prices from pennies to pounds. For more than forty years I have been an author of all work, what the contemptuous call a hack ; but I never went well in harness, which accounts for the fact that no great proportion of my output is lost in newspapers and magazines, though I have written leading articles, reviews and paragraphs in my day, and alas ! obituary notices of most of the writers with whom I have had much to do, as rival or colleague. Now that I am somewhat turned out to grass, I can chew the cud of recollection that in one year, as author, editor, translator or contributor, I was concerned with the preparation of a score of volumes. In another year, I brought forth a dozen or so all my own, some of them, indeed, rather dwarfish. My largest book was the main work of years, a geographical compendium in six quarto volumes, which, revised and brought up to date every year or two, alone makes such a testimonial of industry that I find sometimes doubted the fact of my having written it all myself—save one page. From first to last I must have shed as much ink with my own hand as there was blood in Duncan's body, or in Falstaff's. It has been calculated that if all the sheets I have blotted were set end to end, they would reach, I forget whether it is to Pekin or Petersburg. My volumes piled up would form a column from which Marconi might telegraph to Mars. Or is it that this mass of paper would keep all the buttermen in Britain supplied

for six weeks ? Boasting, indeed, is excluded, when one compares the contemporaneous output of more esteemed writers like Miss Braddon and Mrs. Oliphant, not to speak of Anthony Trollope, who in a letter to Alfred Austin expresses some doubt of being happy in heaven, since there the beatified spirits may not subscribe to circulating libraries.

In the course of half a century, I have taken at least three separate tries at literary success, with a fair result in two of them. But I do not mean to extol my own industry, only to point out that after having had so much to do with book-making for so long,—not to speak of reading innumerable volumes dealing with books and bookmen—I should be dull indeed not to have picked up some knowledge of the business, as of my fellow-practitioners.

This book, about a subject I cannot but understand, I have written as a penance for that youthful sin of writing in ignorance. What it costs me thus to stand in a self-imposed pillory, like Dr. Johnson in the Lichfield market-place, nobody knows so well as myself. Such an avowal may be questioned by hasty readers who find in other books of mine an air of intrusive egoism, as if I loved exposing my personality to public view. But that was only the trick of the conjuror who poses as taking spectators into his confidence, while keeping the card well hidden up his sleeve. I always had a bent for assuming some personality, under which I have generally been able to deceive the public, yea the very elect, for I have a letter from such an expert as Sir J. M. Barrie, in which he remarks of a story of mine that it is evidently a personal reminiscence, yet in fact it was a newspaper paragraph worked up by my own fancy upon an imaginary scene. When I brought out my first successful book, in the character

of an old schoolmaster, few guessed it to come from an inexperienced youth. On the next generation, I repeated the same imposture, with more skill but less applause, in a book called *Cap and Gown Comedy*, the hero of which, partly modelled this time on a real character who was not in a position to recognize himself, related his experiences in several schools, all of a kind unfamiliar to me : this book, when published anonymously, was taken for genuine autobiography, and some reviewers laughed at the way in which the author seemed to reveal his own weaknesses. So too another fiction of mine, describing from materials supplied me the life of an Argentine settler, passed hardly doubted for fact. With more or less success, I have thus played various parts before my readers, inviting them to apparent intimacy with a character in disguise.

These are tricks of the trade. But all along I have cared to hold my real self out of sight, while pulling the strings of my puppets. I have even a whimsical dislike to seeing my true name in print ; and hardly ever appeared in public without some fig-leaf of pseudonymity, writing under several aliases, or sometimes blankly anonymous. All the more for displaying a fictitious face so freely, I have been shy as to keeping my real personality in the background. I have tried to stand stiffly upon a point of literary manners now much neglected, that the public has no right to peep under any mask which an author may choose to wear ; so I sympathized with "Lewis Carroll" in his resentment against an editor who took his true name as advertised *urbi et orbi*. My own motto has always been "No foot over threshold of mine !" This privilege proves hard to secure, where every journalist now thinks it fair to tickle the public with



allusions to the privacy of its entertainers, who are invited to set forth a sketch of their own recreations and antecedents, along with their resorts and addresses. Out of the works of reference that give such information, I did my best to keep my name till the conductor of one such took me by force, and a German editor evolved an account of me from his inner consciousness. It is most reluctantly, then, that for once I write what I would rather have left unprinted till I should no longer be able to read it. Thus then

The man hath penance done,  
And penance more will do.

More than one publisher has invited me to write my reminiscences of literary life, as is done nowadays by many writers. But "story, God bless you, I have none to tell, sir," or next to none worth telling. Of the famous authors of my time, I can say but *vidi tantum*, for the most part as a subaltern beholds plumed and prancing generals. My lines of work, indeed, seldom brought me much into contact with fellow-workmen; still less have I cultivated what is called smart society, whose sayings and doings froth out so much printed gossip. I have had little intimacy with notable personages of any kind to turn into copy. I never held any public post or charge, unless as a volunteer officer or a coroner's jurymen. I have made awkward attempts at more than one handicraft, with the view of gathering straw for literary bricks; in Canada I have tried to follow the plough, but soon found myself wending a homeward way from this amateur pursuit. My view of the world's affairs has been mainly that of a looker-on, who, to be sure, may have his chance of seeing the game. I have lived my life in my own way, not a way that leads to moving

accidents by flood or field ; and all my accomplished work has been reading and writing.

What reminiscences of mine might interest others, have been to a great extent scattered through books already written. Now, instead of collecting them into an insipid memoir, I offer the public a string of reflections, observations, readings and experiences picked up in my half century and more of being concerned with different sorts of authorship. It seems to me that this may interest some readers and writers, as it certainly interests myself.

All this about myself, to explain why I have written it. So far has been pure *Wahrheit* ; in the following pages I may fall into *Dichtung*, holding myself free to do so here and there, should I mention names or matters in which there might be offence to any now living ; but as a rule I shall avoid naming writers still at work. The shamefaced author now resumes his mask to speak more resonantly of authors in general.

## II

### A SHORT HISTORY OF AUTHORS

THE flattering courtiers of King James would have him know how the first Author wrote with Almighty finger upon tables of stone ; while in the preface to our best-read Book, its translators, inspired by hopes of translation to rich bishoprics, style the Scottish Solomon as " Author " of that work. The Jansenist moralist Nicolle declares the devil to be " the greatest author and the greatest writer in the world, as well as the greatest speaker, since he has a share in most of the writings and speeches of men ; " indeed that old serpent is recorded as the first author of fiction. *Lo mio maestro e il mio autore !* are the terms in which Dante almost adores Virgil. " Our author " is Milton's title for the father of mankind. The author of a scandal is less to be respected than that craftsman authentically described in Johnson's Dictionary as " a harmless drudge." From various instances we thus collect the prime idea of an author as a putter forth of something that without him would be nothing visible, audible or legible ; and in latter times the word has tended to denote specially the only begetter of a book, written and capable of being printed.

The definition of " Author," then, seems a simple enough matter : one who has written a book. But most of us write now, learned and unlearned ; and a



world of authors would be like a hive of noisy drones. As Charles Lamb had a catalogue of *biblia a-biblia*, printed volumes fit only for a "gentleman's library," so I should like to exclude from among authors, the writers of Dictionaries, School-books, Hand-books, Cookery-books, Guide-books and works of useful information in general, the compilers of many histories, of most memoirs, of some stories, in short of all pages in which the material surpasses the work, such as are written for mere pay, and to supply the current demand at clubs and circulating libraries. The true author is one who by brooding on himself and the world, hatches some idea of his own, which however raw and shapeless, he cannot but try to give forth for the spiritual sustenance of his fellow-men, the same instinct that guided him in the discovery forbidding him to keep it to himself. The author *par excellence* is the poet or *maker* in verse or prose, albeit he make little more than counterfeits of the coinage minted by other brains. His power is a stirring of some chord within him to a result seeming so unaccountable that it will be taken as inspired from without. No one can command this gift; no one can catch it in a test-tube; no one can examine upon it; the only proof of it is that he so endowed can make men laugh or cry, shape before their eyes the airy nothings of his mental vision, keep his fellow-pilgrims sitting up round the camp fire when they should be courting dreams of their own.

All men, indeed, at some time, find themselves marvellously endowed with imagination. No Shakespeare, no Goethe has such vivid visions as come to the dullest spirit in sleep, hardly remembered beyond the moment when they glimmered through the gate of ivory or horn, rarely to be held fast even by some

drugged dreamer like Coleridge, some overwrought seer like Blake. Children often wake as from a "sleep and a forgetting" into momentary exaltations, on which chosen spirits may look as "clouds of glory." Love is winged to soar into an ethereal mood where it comes easy to catch haloes invisible to the workaday world. Nay, the very lunatic has been coupled with the lover and the poet, as cunning by fits and starts in bodiless creation. The merest bookmaker has moments of glow, perhaps far off touches of greatness, if only "to know well he is not great." The sublimest poets themselves have both their hours of inspiration, and their seasons when cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces appear not to have left a rack behind. Were every man who puts pen to paper always in eruption, even as a sputtering solfatara, the world would be cursed by such active authorship, blighting crops of corn and safe pastures for cattle on a too volcanic soil. The right author is he to whom such stirrings come with a certain periodicity, in bursts of more or less sustained force, not beyond measure and control.

Who can tell when and how the coils of a chimpanzee-like brain were first moved to conceive an idea, curdled out of a welter of vague instincts, memories, curiosities and dull wonderments. The man who had some such experience was the first author, in the bud. Modern philosophers incline to befoul his achievement, putting it down not to any conscious effort, but to some nightmare of indigestion, when, his belly being gorged after a bout of starvation, his wits confused the objective and the subjective, and some gruesome incubus of fancy oppressed him as a fact. From this humble beginning it will be long before he rises to solemn chanting and idyllic

rhyming ; but in each case some molecular disturbance led to a pregnant quickening of the mental pulse. There seems still, indeed, reason to suspect authorship as an unhealthy secretion of human nature, that has for its soundest instinct silently to keep itself going from day to day, and from generation to generation. Shall we call this ferment the yeast without which life would hardly rise beyond a mass of crustless and crumbless dough ?

A hint of science suggests how two kinds of inquiring minds might soon be distinguished, one concerning itself rather with thoughts, the other with things, both too rarely united to make the true sage. Under the shaping hand of Prometheus, some faculty of looking upwards was what elevated the human animal from saurians and gorillas ; yet man who must live by bread has also to take a humbler attitude towards the universe. One by choice raises his eyes, moon-struck and star-dazzled, now and again setting his fellows astare by notions that seem drawn from the clouds ; another bends down, at first on all fours, studying the lie of the land, the tracks of beasts, what sticks and stones can be adapted for offence and defence, by and by hitting on some plan for sharpening those primitive weapons, for striking fire, for baking and boiling flesh, in a word, for improving life by rudimentary arts. Even now there is no one good word to express this type of mind ; but in early ages, long before the unsatisfactory *scientist* had been foisted on us, he might well deserve the title of inventor, while the man of thoughts proved a discoverer of matters lying more at a distance, yet always to be seen by who could see so far. Let us call them *Katametheus* and *Anametheus*, the latter the first artist in words, the former, by observation of his own



fingers and toes, more apt to hit upon numbers—Oxford and Cambridge in the germ.

The student of things was likely to be honoured in his tribe, as a public asset of evident value, all the more if he had strength and cunning to turn inventive faculty to account in the practical business of bloodshed. But even savage man does not live by bread alone; and fighting would rise above mere growling and clawing, to be an art, dignified by a ritual, by sentiments and names. Names being derived from ideas, it would be the tribe's author who first bestowed on the triumphant chief his title of "Man-Mammoth," "Thunderbolt," "Far-shooter" or what not. Adam commenced author when he named the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air; then, long before verses came to be recited, some savage genius would coin household words in calling a lake after the fish it held, a season after the berries it brought, a beast from some onomatopœic imitation of its roar. Names involved similes, metaphors, the germs of all figures of speech. When Katametheus had earned such applause by his contrivance of the bow, the rude tribesmen might open astonished eyes to hear Anametheus compare the flight of the arrow to that of a bird—just what anyone could understand, and this man had first understood! The seeing of likenesses was the birth of fables. It was a high flight of embryo authorship to proclaim the moon for the wife of the sun, the stars as souls of heroes, the sea as the bath of the sky, and the thunder as the voice of some being-not-ourselves whose lightnings shed the awe that is held for foundation of righteousness. When by happy accident, in China or elsewhere, man learned the savour of roast pork, this invention would be set down as communicated from heaven, but

hardly till the idea of a god had been conceived by some author. Katametheus would be more like to hit on his devices by clumsy experiment and patient cudgelling of his wits, while ideas might leap into the head of Anametheus so surprisingly as to seem given him from the unseen power.

With what grin of amazement, passing into nascent amusement, would our author's savage comrades listen to his novel rendering of everyday happenings ! Anyone could be glib enough on matter-of-fact—who knocked down the fat and foolish penguin that made a joke as well as a supper for the shivering crew ; what teeth and prickles the fish had which another failed to bring to land. Not every hungry hunter, however, might think of gloating over a whale or a hippopotamus as a very godsend, the gift of a supernatural power vaguely outlined in a mind that could explain rain as the tears of some mighty mother brooding overhead, and snow as feathers from some great penguin-plucking in the sky. Such ideas would take with the childhood of the world, in which the myth-making faculty is so kindly fostered, and not only any doll readily becomes a fetish endowed with a quasi-sentient life, but imaginary beings may be called forth from the air, shaped on the slightest hint of perplexedly inquisitive experience.

Our children have something of this faculty, till the prison-house of fact shuts up the boy's imagination. Frances Power Cobbe in her *Memoirs* tells of an imaginary being named Peter, whom her nurse imposed on her as a Puck of childish superstition. He who writes this can recall from nursery days how we small chatterers created for ourselves a race of airy personages as heroes of what must have been an embryo work of serial fiction. I remember clearly

that we gave them the name of *The Waiters*, less clearly how we attributed to them no doubt absurd qualities and actions looming gigantically on the horizon of real life, a sort of myth perhaps taking origin in some stay at a large hotel where we might have been impressed by the number and obsequiousness of the attendants, perhaps suggested by an indiscreet nurse who may have had her own reasons for being much concerned with a waiter, though in the end she transferred her worship to a policeman for better or worse. The present author should have been most to blame for this queer romancing; but he seems to recall a tiny sister as throwing herself with zest into the conception. Here we were doing just what ignorant folk have done in all countries and ages, are doing at this day where the world is still agog in open-eyed youth among its puzzling sensations and observations. Perhaps one errs in imagining an author as already distinguished at the childish age when most men might have a like gift of grotesque day-dreams; and it would only be after much communal exercise that an individual here and there began to evince marked faculty in this respect.

Katametheus saw clearly enough that the tree grew, the stone fell and the water moved; it took Anametheus to enounce how they, too, were alive, in a manner, even if not going on legs. Personification was the first great feat of authorship, not yet on the grand Olympian scale of clearly-cut forms preserved for us in Greek art. Vague and mutable were those early imaginations as the lights and shades that cast them upon earth, the threat of rustling branches that gave them a flickering shape, the distant roar of earthquake and volcano that might well seem the voice of some angry monster. Our own well-fed and



well-regulated nurslings are best schooled in a kindly or a jovial mythology, with Santa Claus or the Man in the Moon for its most supernatural figures ; but the world's child, naked as he was to all blasts of fate, would find perilous shadows in the most familiar aspects of nature and veritable bogeys in every manifestation of the unknown. The death-dealing darts of the sun would long strike his eye more sharply than its genial glow ; he would note rather the cruel strength of the sea than its playful beauty ; the tempest, the eclipse, the eruption would paint luridly for his awe-struck mind. The more clearly man comes to think, the more he fixes his wonder on the common—the springing of the grass, the hatching of the egg, the rise and fall of the tide. At the age of feeling, he is excited rather by apparitions that seem uncommon, and therefore terrific.

So, while life was mainly a melodrama, the author's first creations were like to be bogeys, that would not fail to catch contemporary taste in fiction. The practical man of the period, looking down to his feet with a keener eye for snakes and thorns, might speak scornfully of that dreaming stumbler who stared up into the clouds to see them backed like a camel or cleaving the air like a whale. But the most earthly-minded spirit is sooner or later hushed in his mockery by a blow ever overhanging the best guarded life.

I cannot ease the burden of your fears,  
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,

sings our wiser poet, whose remotest ancestor in art was less modest. He, whose weird fancy had given bodies to the spirits of earth and sky, seemed marked out as the man called on to deal with them in the way of invocation or propitiation. Thus your since

esurient author became early connected with a most respectable and sometimes lucrative profession, nay, with all learned professions in their rudimentary stage. He, sooner than another, might turn away mysterious wrath by means of ceremonies, sacrifices, taboos fit to please the creatures of his imagination. Taking courage, as light dawned on a wider horizon, he could call up more beneficent and august shapes to rule the daylight, and drive those fearsome bogeys back into the darkness. In fire and water, he found a sacred blessing as well as a curse of destruction. He published sanctities and cleansings, and bound up the horror of death with rites that went at least to take the mourners off their helpless grief, if not to numb it with promises of a new life. Thus we catch the author grown into renown as the priest, who in time may forge for himself keys of a heaven and a hell, after making gods and demons in his own image, with stories about them that will pass as orthodox till some more aspiring architect in ideas builds a loftier temple for our hopes and fears. We may suppose that the first authors dealt with serious topics; it would be long before life presented any humorous aspect; and humanity was well on its upward way when the ex-ape could be stirred into a hearty laugh.

We have guessed that the man of science would be more honoured, sooner raised to the peerage of his band, as furnishing it with clubs, missiles, cooking apparatus, and rudimentary principles of biology useful in indicating the haunts of a deer or the habits of a bear. This indeed may not always have been so: inventors are seldom rewarded after their desert; and in less unenlightened times, when their inventions may be plagiarized by sharp rivals or turned to the profit of "promoters," they have even been clapped

into prison, or starved in a garret, for not being content to leave things as they are. It is still more doubtful if the first author largely enjoyed what rewards and distinctions were going in his time : he must have had to live down some want of public appreciation ; and one takes him as fain to cultivate the chief's favour by skilfully enhancing reports of heroic prowess in war or the chase, if he did not devote his talent to stories of his own hunting and fishing exploits. It is surmisable that more practically-minded members of the community would be apt to look askance on their day-dreamer as good for nothing but to croon out his idle rigmaroles when the rest were for sleeping or eating, or to ramble off on unsocial wool-gatherings instead of picking whelks for the common pot. There might well seem, however, to be something uncanny in his flightiness, so it would be his own fault if he could not ere long win the respect bred of fear, or, among simple peoples, by a reputation for madness. When he got the length of issuing oracles and incantations, he faced the chief in a sacred character, and claimed a voice in public policy, where one can conceive dissensions, denunciations, excommunications, depositions carried out in the rough, not otherwise than as between Pope and Emperor. The able pow-wow would know how to magnify his office, so we see him playing many parts as well as that of priest,—lawyer, of course, to codify the overmastering will, astrologer to keep note of the seasons, soothsayer to foretell events, physician to drive out the evil spirits of disease, wizard to cast spells as your wise man can, palaverer orator to stir up the warrior's heart, actor to figure in pantomime dances, and a dash of the juggler, perhaps, coming in useful for due performance of other functions. At



this stage we catch some hint of Anametheus and Katametheus going into partnership as a firm for exploiting the ignorance of their fellow-tribesmen. Those early authors, one doubts not, were general dealers in marvel and mystery, with a strong temptation to exalt themselves by humbugging as well as instructing the vulgar.

Such functions might in time become specialized, as when a tribe advanced so far as to have its separate colleges of spiritual and medical pow-wows ; but for long the man of words was also a master of tricks, antics and specially of tones. To help his memory, and for the sake of emphasis, he would hit on some scheme of rhythm, that naturally developed into metre and rhyme. Were his own pulse beats hint enough for systole and diastole of uttered breath ? Was the beginning of it a rhythmic jerking of the body, punctuated by grunts or yells that gradually became articulate ? Or did the imitation of beasts and birds suggest some rhyme such as the *goo-goo* or *ma-ma* of nurseries, where, as I learn from experienced matrons, our babes are susceptible to the lulling chants of " Baby Bunting " or " Humpty Dumpty " long before they can conceive any mental picture of such personages ? Did the whole band begin by howling in chorus like a pack of wolves or a troop of monkeys, till some cock of the roost could win silence for his higher-pitched solo ? In any case, accentuated sounds made embryo verses, more easily remembered, and let themselves be chanted or intoned with impressive effect, enhanced by an accompaniment of such twangings and thumpings in time as most readily tickle ears insensible to elaborate harmonies : the first musical performance may have been kicking one's heels as one sat on a log. So music was born, the

twin of poetry ; and very early authors appeared before their public as minstrels, accompanying themselves on rude tom-toms ere Mercury invented the lyre or Pan wooed the reed-nymph Syrinx.

Meanwhile the men of rudimentary science had hit on other shifts for marking time, counting by fingers and toes, longer calculations by pebbles, by bundles of twigs, by knotted cords, by belts of coloured shells and so forth ; then by and by a further faculty of genius began upon an invention that was to rob the bard of his monopoly. The first artist who scratched a rude figure of man or beast on a clean-gnawed bone, or daubed a rock with coloured clay, or gave a sharpened flint some less clumsy shape, little knew what would come of such devices. It was the author himself, in his quality of priest, who developed pictures into hieroglyphs, hoping still to impress the ignorant herd by the eye as by the ear. But when thus an alphabet of conventional signs came into use, it would only be matter of time that he who chose to learn might read for himself. Oracles, incantations, and musical hocus-pocus fell in value with the rise of letters. A.B.C. headed a new primer of civilization, when almost before he knew it, man took to writing prose. Apollo still remains in title the patron saint of authors ; but henceforth the ruck of them would vow themselves to Mercury and Minerva, if not to less ethereal inspiration. Before letters were invented, indeed, science may have scored by the introduction of telegraphy in the shape of drum taps, far-heard trumpet-blasts or fire signals, for the spreading of immediately useful information ; but ages would pass before such contrivances would be developed as fruitfully as more elaborate priestly records.

The author, though disengaged from his adventitious rôles as medicine-man or mystery-monger, is still a singer when he first stands out in the twilight of European history. The canons of Greek divinity appear fixed rather by poets than by such priests as won more power in the dreamy East, while on our horizon the fame of Homer and Hesiod looms through a haze in which they begin to be themselves taken for quasi-mythological beings. We need not concern ourselves here with the question whether the *Iliad* were the work of a Homer or of "some other man of the same name," or of a College of rhapsodists, gradually licking into epic shape a wandering mass of ballad episodes, as the Finnish *Kalevalla* was artfully put together in our own age, as the legends of Arthur and of Charlemagne were collected into books for less critical times. The stories we have as Homer's had at all events to be published through generations of minstrels and reciters, in whose mouths they could hardly escape undergoing some measure of adaptation. There is at least reason to suppose them edited into their present mould to make a holiday entertainment for the Athenians, who would demand more art and refinement than what passed muster with provincial audiences.

The first books recorded as offered for sale, seem to have been those of the Sibyl, an author who shared the common fate of not being taken at her own estimation, yet her works soon rose to a fancy price, only to perish in the end like so many more authentic volumes. But, whereas those Sibylline books were reduced to a three-volumed form, the early Muses multiplied into three times three; and in the century after the text of Homer appears to have been fixed in writing, we have Herodotus reading out his nine books



of prose, which no strolling bard could be expected to commit to memory, as might be the case with *opuscules* like the fables attributed to Æsop, or the laws and precepts of a Solon, who yet, when he wished to stir the people's hearts, at some political crisis, is said to have made his harangue in impassioned verse. Surprisingly close to the half-fanciful records of Herodotus, we find Thucydides and Xenophon helping to make history and also writing it in a more serious strain; then in their age bursts upon us a galaxy of authors never eclipsed by ancients or moderns—dramatists purging the old superstitions by moving pity and terror in keenly responsive natures—philosophers sublimating the forms of unedifying gods into ideas of the god-like—sages pondering upon phenomena of life that set them theorizing as well as laughing or crying—orators able to become the leaders of mobile-minded freemen—and among the rest religious innovators whose work, if not written down or if reverting to the Orphic utterances of the priest, was suffused into the popular mind in warmer moods of worship and brighter hopes of an unseen world beyond the grave.

Before Lucian came to sweep among the rubbish of crumbling temples, the setting glory of Greece was reflected from the solid grandeur of Rome, whose institutions and its literature still stand as the foundations of our own. With powerful and wealthy patrons to applaud him, with an organized machinery of copyists and booksellers to spread his works abroad, the author is now seen fully conscious of a place in the world. Cicero, among his varied ambitions, boasts that he will set this obscure name above that of Cato and Catuli; Virgil undertakes embalming the memory of an emperor's darling; Horace makes sure

he has built up for himself a monument more enduring than brass,—a vaunt to be echoed in the heart of many a poet, though not all durst declare it and few make it good—

Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

In our day his auto-epitaph has come to be toned with modest joy as well as pride—

I hang 'mid men my needless head,  
And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread ;  
The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper  
Time shall reap, but after the reaper  
The world shall glean of me—me the sleeper !

The shadow of Rome long lay upon the dark ages, lit by a pale after-glow of pagan luminaries. That mistress of the world below was model for Augustine's City of God "where Christ is Roman ;" and Virgil, while for the vulgar he became a magician, was half-beatified as an illegitimate saint who could guide Dante to the throne of the "Emperor of Heaven." As Seneca and Marcus Aurelius had unconsciously breathed a fresh moral air that blew from the East, so the new doctrine did not disdain to blend with the old. Fathers of the Church were fain to learn in classical schools ; and monkish copyists had little to multiply but time-honoured manuscripts, that by and by would be needed as palimpsests for institutes of sounder divinity. Under the hands of these scribes, ancient literature underwent some expurgation, carried out more sweepingly by the fire and sword of Moslem censors.

All along the sock and the buskin had been at odds, when a Euripides with his "dropping of warm

tears " might be irreverently parodied by the rival who displayed Socrates hung up in a basket to public derision ; and a good deal of wit must have been always current of that kind suggesting to Ben Jonson " the original dung-cart." Now clerical censorship would winnow out the gaiety as well as the wisdom of ancient days, preserving rather such writings as might be adapted to Christian edification. When Christianity began to produce a literature of its own, the difference between the vein of Democritus and of Heraclitus is accentuated by cloistered morality. In exceptional works like the *Gesta Romanorum*, an attempt is made to unite the *utile* with the *dulce* ; but for the most part authors became rather sharply divided between purposes of edification and of amusement. When prose grew vernacular, Chaucer qualifies it as doubly fit for matter " in which there be some mirth or some doctrine," and by his example we can guess his conception of mirth. Tonsured teachers, whatever their practice, had professions that drove jesting jongleurs, errant troubadours, by and by losel novelists to another extreme. We all know what was the chief bone of contention between those rivals. Boccaccio gives a farcical turn to one of the earliest stories of clerical authorship, in the Byzantine romance *Barlaam and Josaphat*, where a young prince kept shut up in the dark till his adolescence is then brought out to behold the glories of the world, and of all he sees for the first time admires most frankly young women, though informed that they are " devils who catch men." "*Mulier est hominis confusio*," becomes translated by the sly poet " Woman is manne's joy and manne's bliss ; " yet again Chaucer, speaking in the character of his godly parson, is bound to say—



Thou gettest fable none y-told for me,  
For Paul, that writeth unto Timothy,  
Reproveth them that weivē soothfastness,  
And tellē fables, and such wretchedness.  
Why should I sowē draff out of my fist,  
When I may sowē wheat, if that me list?

Such rebukes, too much deserved, the minstrels resented in satire on their censors, whose own cloisters were often not well adapted for the throwing of moral stones, as witness Boccaccio's satire of the Jew converted by a visit to Rome, which convinced him this must be a divine religion that throve for all the vices of its ministers. We need hardly be told, then, on what sort of stories the mere story-tellers would try their hand, when from sterner moralizers like Dante, we learn how the teachings of the Church were poisoned by hypocrisy, and when such a satirist as Rabelais was fain to turn hypocrisy inside out, putting on a grinning mask from beneath which he could more safely insinuate a lesson to his age. This jarring between teachers and ticklers of the mind would go on for long, most clearly shown on the stage that sets itself up against the pulpit; and not yet is it fully seen how no teaching profits unless it be true, and how no humour is wholesome unless infused by sympathy. It is a hoary jest that of the limited stock of amusing stories authors have to turn about in their kaleidoscopes—the whole number variously counted from seven to thirty-nine—only one third are fit to be told before ladies. No wonder that minstrels, like actors, came to be legally classed with rogues and vagabonds!

The most approved literature of that age, before ladies' ears became more delicate, appears to have been the romances whose flights of long-winded fancy would be laughed away by Cervantes; but the

rhymers and chroniclers of chivalry deserved in the main to be the most popular authors of their period. They wrote as gentlemen for gentlemen, and ladies, adapting classical scholarship, too, to their purposes, when Alexander and Theseus could serve them as chivalric heroes. Nor on them need the Church frown, for their heroes as a rule duly kept vigils and fasts, before turning consecrated weapons chiefly against paynim giants and caitiffs; or, if now and then they lapsed into sin, that could be set right by retirement into a hermitage and founding masses to pray for souls too venturesome to be saintly. Dante's great work, after all, is but a pious romance, a comedy with its happy ending in heaven; and if some of the tales Chaucer was ashamed to look back on seem fit rather for the tap-room of the Tabard, most of his work could kindle the brightest eye without bringing a blush to the softest cheek. Poetry would clear its own atmosphere without help from the fumigations of theology. Meanwhile, such heterodox teachers as Huss and Bruno must expect to be duly burned; but your Aretinos and the like will not be much persecuted for mere obscenity. Such were the *ps* and *qs* authors had to mind in those ages of faith, when the faults of rulers or pastors might be most safely touched in chuckling over Reynard the Fox's sly tricks on power and dignity.

By this time the Universities had undertaken to share with the monasteries the work of book production, while serious literature was still in the hands of Doctors of Divinity, brooding owlshly upon what Erasmus mocks at as "Niceties of Notions, Relations, Quantities, Formalities, Quiddities, Haeccities, and such like Abstrusities." The Schoolmen, however subtle, seraphic, irrefragable, or invincible, had read

themselves blind over their syllogisms, sophisms, and distinctions, when the Renaissance came to quicken the pulse of learning with a fever that would soon drive doctors and scholars into two hostile camps.

Just as men's minds were ready for a new crop of doctrine, there stole into our world an invention for disseminating it. Who first thought of stamping blocks on paper, then of printing from metal types, may be matter of controversy, as in the case of that blacker business of gunpowder: both inventions appear to have been anticipated in China, where neither of them as yet has worked such revolution as in the progressive West. The British Museum boasts a book well printed in China about the time King John was putting his seal to Magna Charta—for eventual exhibition at another of our public institutions. There seems reason to suppose that in Europe the first essay of printing was by blocks used to stamp figures on playing-cards, which have been called the devil's books. Typography comes to full light about the middle of the 15th century, its first notable artisan being one Gutenberg of Mentz, furthered and promoted by a certain pecunious Fust, whose name might well be confused by the vulgar with that of Faust. The art could indeed pass for magical, by which books were at once cheapened to a sixth or so of their former price, not at once improved, for prentice typography would seem coarse beside the careful work of practised scribes; and we hear of fastidious scholars who despised the new volumes, as their like nowadays may prefer Aldines and Elzevirs to cheap popular editions. What the scribes themselves thought and said of printed books, may be guessed by any student of vested interests; but they, scattered over Europe, could not make such an uproar as those



craftsmen who lived by the worship of Ephesian Diana.

Luther was the Paul who would now start a wider and louder uproar, swelled and spread abroad by printed books, which in the northern half of Europe had the most eager readers. That the new doctrine found many readers here goes to show how the Church, hitherto their sole teacher, could not have been so much concerned to keep them in ignorance as is fondly thought by true-blue Protestants. The Church had at first patronized the printing press, as an engine for giving fresh momentum to its teaching. But when that engine could be so easily turned against its own authority, it began to hold in suspicion the rebellious force too well handled by its adversaries. So, no sooner did the author's arm become strengthened manifold, as by the use of a pulley or a lever, than he felt it heavily shackled in chains, not always, everywhere and by all men to be burst.

Inquisition, *imprimatur* and *Index Expurgatorius* were fetters that held firm on half the mind of Europe, while the other half but slowly learned what Cicero could have told them long before Milton, how "though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength." Even yet it is not clear to some that no infallible power on earth, vested in one or many, seated at Rome or Geneva, speaking through flesh and blood or from printed paper, can soundly dogmatize to the soul, whose nature is growth in wisdom. Nobody in Luther's time understood how creeds had to be snuffed like candles, from hour to hour; and those who took upon themselves this useful office were then very like to burn their fingers, or singe their wigs.

Shortsighted beyond all other students seem the official censors, when the most authentic *Index*, as brought up to date, frowns at Milton, at Gibbon, at Heine, but winks at Tom Paine and Shelley, bars Kant and Comte while overlooking Huxley and Tyndall, and duly notes the heresies of Erasmus Darwin with blinking eyes blind to those of his grandson. The faithful may read Dickens with a clear conscience, though not Dumas, father or son; George Sand is suspect, as not George Eliot; *Gil Blas* passes the examination at which *Le Père Goriot* is plucked; and Maeterlinck has lately been put under a ban that does not extend to the farces of the Palais Royal. But such oversights matter little, now that so ill-aimed artillery is served mainly by blank cartridge.

Luther himself little guessed all that would come of throwing his inkstand at the devil's head. It would be long before the Reformation grew conscious of its true spirit; but then was set afoot the struggle for free thought and free speech which must end in complete victory, or in once more enslaving man's mind as books themselves were chained in those ages of dark faith. The fires of persecution fizzed and spluttered upon earth, while the stars in their courses lit up the triumphant march of reason from battle-field to battle-field. In those battles the white plumes of kings shine before the ranks; the oriflammes of either side are held up by statesmen and churchmen; but the trumpets of the victors were sounded by authors, who presently take on themselves to be teachers without being preachers. And, when books, grave as well as gay, are written in vernacular tongues, the heavy batteries of folios and quartos become reinforced by smaller pieces, down to broadsheets and fly leaves, on which he who runs can read and learn to

think. Time will come, indeed, when he may be helped to read without thinking ; but the first concern of the printing-press was with serious thoughts to breed momentous deeds, even where for centuries they might be stifled in the dank vaults of the Inquisition. The first volume printed, as beseems, was the Vulgate translation of our Book of Books, held up by Reformers as text for all truth, so now translated into familiar speech in which learned or unlearned might undertake to commentate or expound ; but for generations its critics, higher or lower, would be expelled from all synagogues, even those that in their taller pulpits set reason above ritual.

While mere authors thus found a new place and dignity in the modern world, they had missed attending to their material interests after a manner that went to bring them into contempt with the vulgar of all ranks. What had seemed worth buying and selling in almost authorless ages was the copy of some approved work treasured by monks, who for love or money might be willing to multiply it. The author who would guard his right of property in the child of his brain, had in old days only to keep his handiwork to himself, a protection as little welcome as the judgment of Solomon to the true mother. When printed books began to get abroad, the profit of them was at first a matter of licensed monopoly or other privilege, that fell into the hands of the printer rather than of the author, then of the publisher who found his account in employing them both. In what proved somewhat of a confused scramble for the gains of the new trade, the author came worst off, as most willing to take his pay in coinage of promise and bills of fame, not always honoured. His share of the material gains he looked for rather by the indirect



way of place or pension, courting the favour of royal and noble patrons with fulsome dedications, sometimes rewarded, but seldom according to his own estimate of desert ; and more often his fate was like Spenser's, of whom the legend goes that he died in destitution—

To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares,  
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs.  
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,  
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

Little was to be got, then, by appealing to the public as patron. Robert Greene, best remembered by his spiteful hit at Shakespeare as an "upstart crow," is supposed to have been the first English author that tried to make a livelihood by his pen, and he came to a poverty-stricken death-bed. Shakespeare, who throve as a dramatist and actor-manager, seems hardly to have thought it worth while to look after the publication of his plays. Ben Jonson, who also made money by the stage, was glad of a salary as poet laureate, eked out by windfalls of bounty. Otway is said to have choked himself on his first eager bite after a spell of starvation. But one need not heap up instances of genius fated to starve on a diet of praise, that old story of *laudatur et alget*.

Clerical and academic authors had a better chance to be provided for by preferment. A lay-poet or philosopher thought himself lucky to succeed the jester or the chaplain in households of the great, as Hobbes was entertained by the Devonshire family, and Gay by the Duchess of Queensberry. Less fortunate were those who had to wait in the ante-chambers of lords, to stomach stony condescension as sauce for meat and drink, or to be paid off with a purse of gold,

too long owed to tailor or tavern-keeper. Gil Blas, among his varied experiences of patronage, has to tell how even an actress, in receiving a poet whose tragedy was accepted, would say "Keep your seats, gentlemen ; it is only an author." Fielding in his *Author's Farce* makes poor Luckless hear from his landlady how "my floor is all spoiled with ink, my windows with verses, and my door has been almost beat down with duns," so as soon as she can get rid of him, she will hang over her door "No lodgings for poets !" Richard Savage's *An Author to be Let* is of course an ill-natured caricature of his fellows in misfortune ; but that its charges were not much exaggerated is shown by his friend Dr. Johnson's life of this author, fain to prostitute his muse in rancorous flattery of the great, and in such flights of a hungry genius as "The Animalcule, a Tale occasioned by his Grace the Duke of Rutland's receiving the Small-pox by Inoculation."

The first record of money paid on a bargain for copyright, seems to have been that beggarly account that made the price of *Paradise Lost*. England had been before other countries in recognizing some vague right, at common law, belonging to an author in what profit could be made out of his works. This was first defined by a statute of 1709, granting a scrimp period of copyright. But though thus the matter began to be better organized, the business partner in literary enterprise still got the lion's share of the booty, thanks to the carelessness, the unworldliness, the neediness of dwellers in Grub Street, who had to console themselves by setting up the publisher as target of their lampoons. A prudent poet, indeed, well off for acquaintances in the world where Pope and Addison made their footing good, might do well enough for himself by printing on the basis of a subscription list, which, in some cases,

had no superstructure, and proved merely "a handsome way of asking one's friends for a guinea;" Goldsmith records an author whose only works were proposals, on which he had lived comfortably for a dozen years. But the rank and file of authors had to hurry to sell their work for what they could get from the publisher, who came in time to be their patron. Such fine gentlemen as took the trouble to write, were ashamed to figure in the ranks of so ragged a regiment, and for long scorned to draw the poor pay of a not too reputable service. In the reviews and magazines of the early nineteenth century, it was first made a rule that every contributor should willy-nilly pocket his *honorarium*, gilded by some such refinement of title. By this time my Lord Byron was not above bargaining with Mr. John Murray; and Sir Walter Scott, whose muse had already yielded him half-a-crown per line, was unluckily tempted to go *ultra crepidam* in passing paper for gold. And now that the lottery of authorship was seen to contain rich prizes as well as blanks, the nobility and gentry proved not less ready to put into it than the hungry drudges of Grub Street.

It may seem questionable how far the author gains in freedom and self-respect when he exchanges the service of the patron for that of the bookseller. The patron, if a right prince or lord, might be a more appreciative employer; and in any case, for his own credit, would be concerned for the brilliancy of his literary satellite. The bookseller's eye is chiefly on his customers, to please whom he brings forth bad as well as good, so long as either pays. A certain author of our time is not singular in having spent a good part of his life over a book, which ought to be published as a valuable asset for scholarship: so every publisher



to whom it has been submitted allows, but refuses to "touch" it as almost certain to prove a heavy loss. *Per contra*, a peer who was his own patron ruined himself by a sumptuous work in which he vainly hoped to play the part of Columbus for the Lost Tribes of Israel. I could tell tales also of publishers who have played the disinterested patron to books that deserved success without commanding it; but publishing is of course a business that must be carried on with a clear balance-sheet. So some authors would prefer a patron, if they could pick the patron, to that many-headed supporter that sometimes sees their merits aright, yet *est ubi peccat*. This question falls to be treated later on, when we come to the by-products of authorship.

That only bad writers have any cause to regret patronage is the emphatic opinion of a famous author, who did not live into an age when his "every school-boy" no longer "thumps to pieces classics like Don Quixote." Anyhow, for good or evil, by Macaulay's cheque for twenty thousand pounds was signed and sealed the title of an author to consideration as dependent on public favour alone. Since then, Acts of Parliament, Judicial decisions, Copyright conventions, Authors' trade-unions, literary agents and other machinery have been at work to enhance the value of his property. He had never been backward in thinking highly of himself; and now contemporaries are disposed at last to think well of his work, recognizing that tiny weapon, the pen, as in the long run mightier than the sword, and having a far wider scope than the eloquence that could move Areopagus or Forum when a small city and its environs made a famous state. As far back as 1760, a denizen of Grub Street, James Ralph, seems to have been the first who modestly

boasted, "The Pen has its power and may do some sort of execution as well as a sword ;" but two generations had to pass before that pretension was brought to note. Yet in quite mediaeval days, we may see the pen often moving the sword, when mailed lords had an eye to fame at the hand of scribes or minstrels hanging on to courts and camps, and more than one feather-brained prince was stirred to war by the reading of romances.

The author is sometimes inclined to complain that his craft does not rank among learned professions ; yet he may remember how, even from his Grub Street garret, he has been the teacher of those dignitaries that still take precedence of him in the world's honour, if not in its heart, while now there is no wig or coronet worn so high but that a feather of authorship may be stuck in it with public applause. All the old abuses and stupidities were shown in their true light by authors, while the learned doctors, sergeants and pedagogues whose business it had been to reform them were still blinded by use and wont or professional prejudice. In the good old days, not so far gone, when the doctor believed in drugging, the dominie in drubbing, and the divine's motto also began with a *d.*, out-at-elbows scribblers are once and again found speaking up for what is now seen to be common sense and humanity. The new theologies and larger hopes of our lower-pitched pulpits, were long ago preached by authors, often at sore risk of their skins, from the days when the prophets of Israel taught that a contrite heart was more to the purpose than all the blood of priestly sacrifices. Long before physicians found out how nothing in their pharmacopœias was more effectual than the *vix medicatrix naturae*, novelists and playwrights needed no diploma to see through the humbug

of a Diafoirus or a Sangrado; Petrarch did not stick at criticizing the *materia medica* of his time. The growing mildness of the law, too, was first prompted by authors, who had in their own persons a good chance of being clapped into prison along with the Reverend Mr. Primrose and Mr. Pickwick: the big-wigs did not hurry themselves to sweep out the dusty Court of Chancery till they were poked up by Dickens, who helped Thackeray to shame us from the brutality of public executions.

There is indeed no institution of Church or State which bold authors have feared to attack with tears or laughter, that in the end could conquer or convert the stiff-neckedness of official defenders. Statesmen have to remember what a Rousseau and a Voltaire did to undermine throne and altar. By the pen, that can call out the sword, even kings have been schooled to understand that there is a lith in their necks; wise Canutes draw back their thrones from the advancing tide of public opinion, whose waves roar and dash in the voice of the press; and parliaments are fain to recognize that once despised army as a fourth estate of the realm. Oratory, without a reporter, carries no further than ear-shot; but the artillery that uses ink for powder has all the world as its range, and may reach its mark through centuries. The schoolmaster, so notoriously abroad nowadays, is but the clerk, the dispenser, the usher of the author, when those who can write what other men care to read are, for good or ill, the rulers and instructors of their people.

Not that it is by direct instruction authors most make their influence felt. Their work goes to raise as well as to register the intellectual temperature of the world, till men feel themselves able to lay aside the wrappings of prejudice and bigotry they once drew



about them all the closer for sharp winds of criticism. The arguments against persecution, against superstition, against class-privilege, were as sound and strong in the days of the Star-chamber and the Bastille as they are now ; but our eyes had to be opened to them through the heart by quite other methods than those of dogma and reasoning. One bugbear of humanity after another has vanished like the iceberg that comes drifting down from glacial tracts of ignorance and fear. No battering availed to sink that mighty mass, pitilessly crushing whatever lies in its path, and chilling all around with its shadow. But ever it moves to its own destruction in more genial latitudes. Always it goes imperceptibly trickling away, its line of flotation altering as some corner slips off into schism with a great cackling of black and white penguins, or a growling of bears vociferous over the ruin of their castle ; then these sections in turn may collide with a grinding crash, or glue themselves together afresh in some still imposing form. But their end is sure if slow, a quiet vanishing, or a sudden splitting to pieces that stirs wide waves of commotion by the last sinking struggles. About such a berg a poet can say pretty things, having an eye for its graceful outlines, for its glistening pinnacles, for its glowing tints, even for its fearsome majesty. But, consciously or unconsciously, he himself is the minister of the sun-god that smites into water the brood of darkness and cold.

The author's mission is to warm and enlighten the life of man, conceiving and shaping, expanding and colouring for him the ideas that enrich his soul. Since man is superior to all other animals chiefly in the gifts of thought and speech, authors, as the most articulate of men, ought to rank—but here one must remember how beasts are not capable of such crimes and follies as so basely alloy human nature.

### III

#### THE ANATOMY OF AUTHORS

So much to show how, through the ages, authors have helped to make men better and wiser. The next step, then, should be to set forth the author as himself the best and wisest of men. But alas ! there are preachers who do not practise the virtues of which they may keenly feel the need, and priests who eat and drink their own damnation in unworthy ministering to the spiritual wants of others. Thus of teachers in print it must be confessed that they not only share the imperfection of humanity, but are liable to special blemishes of character, congenital weaknesses, speckles and ringstrakings that too much mark them off among the common herd.

A very authoritative voice in ancient days was Apollo's oracle, whose priestess, intoxicated by mephitic vapour, would be taken as possessed by the god to utter judgments and prophecies. Even so, an eloquent author often seems the unconscious mouthpiece of some invisible spirit. Genius we call this possession, to be distinguished from the talents cultivatable by the mass of men. I make bold to differ from the definition of genius as an infinite capacity for taking pains. Carlyle took infinite pains to work up his utterances into oracular impressiveness, but he would have strained language in vain had he not been in-

spired by a power that made him a poet "wanting the accomplishment of verse;" and indeed greater accuracy of narration could be attained by more careful historians without his gift for moving minds that questioned his facts and rejected his conclusions. Accuracy, lucidity, correctness may be striven for; but genius comes of itself, and not to all men, which is by no means to say that the genius will make much of his faculty without taking pains in its development. The diamond fetches its price through cutting, polishing and setting; but you must have your diamond to begin with, of which imitations are not uncommon; and the purest gem is akin to humbler forms of carbon. To be capable of sparkling in words, one must have the properties of genius, except perhaps height, breadth or length. On consideration, I withdraw the metaphor of the diamond, to replace it by that of a pearl, now and then found secreted unexpectedly from dull and flabby tissues. Bitter tongues have even compared the author to a spiteful and venomous toad that may yet wear a precious jewel in his head.

"I can only gather wood and lay it on the altar," said Goethe: "the fire must descend from heaven." Every right author—setting aside the majority of authors to be treated as no authors—has a spark of genius, however faint, a gift differing in kind rather than in degree from the abilities of which other men are conscious. It comes, indeed, like fire from heaven, or elsewhere, falling upon a nature that more or less readily proves tinder to flash up or smoulder out; and the kindling of a blaze depends on fuel artfully disposed to catch the flickering flame. By rubbing two sticks together, and in time by utilizing chemical affinities, you can also call forth hidden seeds of fire, but certain bodies and most heads might be rubbed or thumped for ever



without striking out the least flash, though these bodies may burn briskly enough in a bonfire set well light.

Genius, then, I would define as a shining manifestation of the creative faculty, existing in many minds, but oftenest more obscurely. All right authors must have some vein of more or less pure carbon in their composition; Shakespeare and Scribe differ not so much in kind as in degree. "Talent is that which is in a man's power; Genius is that in whose power a man is," declares a sounder critic than Carlyle. Shall we put it that genius implies an overmastering propensity to something out of the common and to a great extent beyond calculation. The flowers and the fruits of it may depend on labour, on patience, on skilful tendence, on opportunity; but the root of the matter seems hidden in earth, soiled by a fertilizing temperament from which all the imaginative arts draw their sap.

Another metaphor for interpreting the author's nature is a chord, that responds to external influences like an Æolian harp. Not sense but sensibility is his *forte*, as his *foible* may be not to recognize his gamut of emotions. The great poet seems in tune with all the music of the spheres, from the sublimest pæan to the saddest and stillest music of humanity. The small story-teller but fitfully and feebly catches broken notes of inspiration. Both depend for applause on a certain practised power of giving out, more or less resonantly, the harmonies stirred within them. There are poets also

that never sing,  
But die with all their music in them.

Every human soul, to be sure, is fitted with a barrel-

organ that in most cases plays but two or three familiar tunes, a dull, monotonous strumming for business hours, quickened at the home fireside, falling into a minor key by death-beds, perhaps rising to a higher pitched strain on Sundays and in lovers' lanes. The author would seem to have several such airs, or snatches of them, in his machinery, which he can play in turn, and perhaps plays much the same tune over and over again with variations. He is Hamlet, or a bit of him, as well as himself; he may be Falstaff, Shylock, or Lady Macbeth by turning on the proper stop; in one mood he can rage like a tyrant in Hercules' vein, as in another take the voice of some gentle lady married to a Moor, or sneer and lie for the nonce with the cunning of an Iago. Cervantes is a potential Don Quixote, doubled with a Sancho Panza. The living musical box is a Goldsmith, more limited in its selection of parts, or a Byron that resolves into catching harmony the echoes of a discordant self, or a Cowper with a few symphonies of more softness than compass. These resources he has in different degrees of imperfection, and as his power is to be measured by the range of them, the pleasing of his audience will depend much on his ability to produce his strong notes with effect, while keeping away from or slurring over the gaps there must be in most such keyboards. However clear the strain given forth, there will be much inward jarring of which the author himself is most conscious, yet sometimes the dullest hearer also can detect a false note.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pereant isti*—nay, indeed, but what a pity that one has to glean in fields left bare by so many keen sickles! After stumbling, as I believed, on that original figure of a barrel-organ, I take up a favourite author, already quoted in these pages, and find him playing on the same instrument, its strain perhaps echo-

It is the music of the author's life that often gives audible discords, as if the effort to ring a peal of fancies left his own bells jangling out of tune. The name of this *irritable genus* has always passed as a proverb for certain defects of character, though at most times its sons have been in circumstances to call for the practice of Christian graces. Such besetting sins as inconsistency, jealousy, querulousness and quarrelsomeness are the badge of all their tribe. Great wits have been authoritatively pronounced near akin to madness, a story as old as Plato and Aristotle, not to speak of Pythian oracles. The multitudinous memoirs of the race give one the idea that, as a rule, they must have been hard to live with, harder still to do business with. And in case I be accused of an itch for slandering my betters in this craft, let me take a text from Leslie Stephen, a critic of wide sympathy, who as Editor of our National Biography, had much occasion for considering the subject under consideration.

Literature is, in all cases, a demoralizing occupation, though some people can resist its evil influences. It is demoralizing

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ing unconsciously in my memory. "Life turns the winch, and fancy or accident pulls out the stops. I come under your windows some fine spring morning, and play you one of my *adagio* movements, and some of you say,—This is good—play us so always. But, dear friends, if I did not change the stop sometimes, the machine would wear out in one part and rust in another. How easily this or that tune flows! You say—there must be no end of just such melodies in him. I will open the poor machine for you one moment, and you shall look. Ah! Every note marks where a spur of steel has been driven in. It is easy to grind out the song, but to plant these bristling points which make it was the painful task of time." O. W. Holmes: *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*.



because success implies publicity. A poet has to turn himself inside out by the very conditions of his art, and suffers from the incessant stimulants applied to his self-consciousness. The temptation is inevitable, and is, of course, the stronger and the more corrupting as the right to satisfy a vulgar curiosity is more generally admitted. Formerly, if a man wanted to talk about himself, he wrote an autobiography to be published posthumously, and there was therefore some safeguard, in so far as he was not to be directly conscious of the effect produced. Now the autobiography is being superseded by the 'reminiscences,' in which every one is invited to explain what a genial and charming creature he is, how thoroughly he appreciates his contemporaries, and how superior he is to any desire for popular praise. If reminiscing is not a name for hypocritical attitudinizing, it shows, as I am glad to believe, what charming and excellent people many of our contemporaries still are, in spite of all the corrupting influences to which they are exposed. *Studies of a Biographer*, III. 30.

Better than other kinds of celebrities, authors are known to us by their works, even if they write no express memoirs, in which they may naturally try to put the best face on themselves, yet are not always successful in hiding the warts. Sometimes the autobiographer's humour is to pose *in puris naturalibus*, as a Cellini or a Rousseau professes to strip himself bare, yet leaves some rags covering perhaps as many blemishes as he displays. Sometimes we get a fair idea of our hero from familiar letters, written in slippers and night-cap, if only we could be sure that they were not indirectly addressed to the public. We must not be too ready to trust all that may be said about himself by one whose craft is fiction, which is not the same thing as falsehood. Yet as truth may be stranger than fiction, so fiction is sometimes truer than truth, an experience squaring with Aristotle's dictum about impossible probabilities and improbable possibilities.

A poet who stuck strictly to matter of fact might be pronounced by Herbert Spencer "unthinkable."

The romancer is naturally bound to be untruthful, in the vulgar sense of the word. Such an honest gentleman as Walter Scott owned that he could not repeat an anecdote without fitting it out with a cocked hat and stick ; and when the poor author gets a job to dress out his own story, dearest of all to himself, be sure he will not lose the chance of sending it abroad in what finery he can command, however tattered and tarnished. In estimating his claims and confessions we must consider the laws of refraction, and the imperfect mirror on which he reflects his own nature ; with such help it may be possible to get to the facts of the case, even though distorted and blurred in his highly coloured statements.

This itch for fibbing is an accusation against us, for which extenuating circumstances may be pleaded. Your dull honest man often speaks the truth for want of imagination, or if he do make up a lie it is as like as not so ill-made that nobody will be taken in by it. Genius has a temptation for which allowance should be conceded. All the same, a certain now neglected poet says well, " I give him joy that's awkward at a lie ! " The wise liar by trade does well to keep a watch over his speech in hours out of business. It was said of Sothern that when acting Lord Dundreary for hundreds of nights, he regularly practised himself in careful reading aloud that his tongue might not grow crippled into a permanent stammer. So authors, when they fold their wings from flight, should take wholesome exercise by waddling upon stony realities. An hour a day, for instance, might with advantage be given to reading the reports of mining companies, the speeches of candidates for parliament, or the evidence of scientific experts on both sides. By some such course of strenuous attention to prosaic facts, the

Muses' son could correct a propensity often detrimental to the character of his temperament.

Let it not be forgotten that there are two kinds of lies, as of truths, answering to Aristotle's distinction between history and poetry. The one comes straight from hell ; the other brings airs from a higher quarter, whence issue also true dreams through a gate of horn. White lies and black lies are not to be judged with the same severity. By all means hang the smiler who comes with fair words on his lips and a knife hid under his cloak. The schemer who sells me for ready money a potentiality of growing rich which he knows to be due on the Greek Calends, deserves whipping at the cart-tail of public opinion. The tradesman who exhibits in his window a live turtle as earnest of soup to be concocted from conger eels in the back shop, ought to be pilloried before all Billingsgate. But the trustful youth who, beholding such an eel, brings back to his cronies the report " Rejoice with me, for I have seen an elephant ! " should, *pace* the Reverend Mr. Chadband, be heard with a smile as well as a frown. Here is a perilous yet pardonable gift of picturesque statement, a not unpraiseworthy effort to exalt common and unclean things, a desire to arouse interest even at the expense of matter-of-fact measurements. So too may the professional seer of Gorgons and hydras and chimæras claimsome benefit of clergy for his hyperboles and *eidola*. Whole nations have the same talent in some degree, those of Celtic blood, for instance, that leavens the heavy dough of Saxon understanding. The imaginative writer is, among his fellow-men, a sort of Celt dwelling apart upon mountains, where all hard outlines become often veiled behind mists against which his own shadow may loom out in magnified proportions edged with brilliant haloes. We need not too



harshly condemn the enchanter who, in placing his personality before the world, would fain make himself out as he wishes to be rather than as he is. And with all his pains, he himself is the most likely to be deceived, he who repeats from age to age that self-knowledge forms the crown of wisdom. See how ready he is to believe his lead transmuted into gold by the smoky crackle he takes for an alchemist's furnace !

Self-deception comes so easy to one whose business it is to deceive. Perhaps the most harmless lies of the author—least harmful to himself—have been those hoaxes which he has often loved to play on the public—Chatterton's fabrications, and Ireland's, imitated by William Harrison Ainsworth, Edgar Allan Poe's balloon story, Defoe's apparition of Mrs. Veal, and so forth. These are mere feats of acting that wash off the character, even though a man black himself all over to play Othello. The worst of it is such stain as comes to the dyer's hand, by daily dabbling in his honest trade. The greatest authors appear to have most aptitude for keeping clear of their own concoctions. The mass of us find too many opportunities for being imbued with humbug, becoming intoxicated by the "exuberance of our own verbosity," practising on our souls solitary vices that are ruinous to moral health.

If we wish to make others weep, we must have tears in our own voice, we are told, and some of us cultivate a dangerous faculty of weeping at any hour. Those of us who have to make our living by it cannot always afford to wait for the melting mood. If natural emotion do not flow freely, we must pump it up, and a sweating job that is when the pump begins to go rusty. Even when our pumps are sucking freely, we get into the way of looking out for all showers that will help to fill cisterns of invention. Many authors

have been fain to confess how in crises of personal agitation, under the darkest storms of fate, at the very death-bed of their dear ones, they caught themselves keeping a tear-dimmed eye half open for symptoms and sensations that would make copy. "If I was going to be hanged myself," confesses Thackeray, "I think I should take an accurate note of my sensations, request to stop at some public-house on the road to Tyburn, and be provided with a private room and writing materials, and give an account of my state of mind." Nothing is too sacred to go into a description. No friend is too kind to be studied for a character, when enemies are not at hand. No memory is so precious but that it may be set in a sonnet. Even the tenderest ties of home serve to bind up our communications to the public. Victor Hugo's *Contemplations* were over the grave of his child. Can one hear without pain how Dickens caricatured his friends, and exhibited the weaknesses of his father and mother, however humorously? I knew one celebrated writer who confessed to me that his own father had sat to him as villain of a novel, which he had the grace to keep back from publication during the old man's life. The natural emotions may even grow perverted in an over-wrought heart. Landor raged against his wife and children as bitterest of the many enemies he made for himself. And when it comes to Sterne's snivelling over a dead ass, with his back turned upon wife and mother, to Rousseau's giving excellent counsel for mothers while carrying his own babes to the Foundling, to Coleridge moralizing in fine words that did not butter parsnips for his family,—alas! it too plainly appears how we have this treasure of ours in earthen vessels.

Some authors seem not unaware of their own incon-

sistency. Take Alfieri, "taciturn and calm, petulant and talkative by turns, my spirits always in extremes," as he describes himself, and shows clearly how he could be generous or selfish, idle or laborious, resentful or forgiving, as the fit took him. He glorified virtue, and ruined the peace of families. He denounced tyranny and class-distinctions, yet once he illustrated the rights of man by cutting his valet's head open with a candlestick, because the poor fellow had twitched his hair. He expatriated himself by way of renouncing allegiance to the king whose uniform he continued to wear as becoming him. He ardently championed popular liberty and hailed the French Revolution, but soon loathed the Frankenstein's monster he had helped to bring forth. His works are consistently lofty and austere; but he was so conscious of his weakness that he had his hair cut ludicrously short, or would make his servant tie him up in a chair to keep him from going out to make a fool of himself. So far his own confessions: to one of his biographers he appears "to have had no principles, good or bad, but only passions," running to utter waste had not genius transfigured them to noble verse. Strange alchemy of human nature! An idle, ill-taught schoolboy was to make Greece and Rome live again on his pages. A dissipated nobleman was to be the herald of liberty. A morbid, turbulent, capricious nature was to ferment with the regenerating spirit that would breathe life into his motherland, dead image of beauty as it was.

*Seusa i trasporti insani; ai detti suoi  
Non badar punto: è fuor di se.*

It is in the best clothes and with the most winning simper, that most authors choose to sit to themselves for their own portraits. But however they may try



to dissemble or carry off their own shortcomings, they have a keen eye for kindred failings, and the accounts they give of one another do not often err on the side of flattery, though these may be no more faithful than their autobiographical pictures. We need not go back to the quarrelsome days of the Dunciad, nor rake up the mud thrown by Decker at Ben Jonson, and by Nash at Gabriel Harvey, Spenser's "Hobinol." Note, for example, how Balzac shows up his fellow-craftsmen in those private *Lettres à l'Etrangère*; and what a full-length portrait of "Immortals" Alphonse Daudet draws, while Zola was proclaiming *Mes Haines*, and the Goncourt brothers leered at moral nakedness with which they kept company. Recall what Thackeray thought of Bulwer Lytton, and Disraeli of Thackeray, when literary gentlemen retorted epithets like "School-miss Alfred" to "the padded man that wears the stays." Our generation, indeed, has studied a restraint in the expression of such sentiments, so that it is with a shock of surprise we read in current pages what Dr. G. M. Gould has to say of his friend Lafcadio Hearn, whose work he praises warmly for rare excellencies, while describing the man as "deprived by nature, by the necessities of his life, or by conscious intention, of religion, of morality, scholarship, magnanimity, loyalty, character, benevolence and the other constituents of personal greatness." This is quoted only to show how the character of one author may strike the eye of another; for a rival embalmer of Hearne's memory, Miss Bisland, shows more of the induced autobiographic spirit by laying on sweeter unguents.

Dr. Gould's censure seems a rare admission, since our present-day convention exalts superstitiously the canon *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. The literary world

was shocked when Swinburne laid a wreath of nettles upon the grave of John Addington Symonds—*mortuo moriturus*. Eyes were turned up when Henley, writing about his dead friend R. L. Stevenson, hinted at him as somewhat fallen from artistic grace since the days of their Bohemian comradeship. Stevenson himself is said to have written for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* an article on Burns that had to be suppressed as too critical; and we remember what an outcry there was among perfervid Scots against Henley's plain dealing with the frailties of that darling memory. More recently, again, Goldwin Smith's outspoken estimates of some contemporaries came with a sour relish. But anyone who has access to the conversation of authors, knows how it is civility rather than charity that dictates many an obituary notice.

Leaving out of sight for the moment what this brotherhood write of themselves or of one another, we need not search far for examples how an author looks to men of the world and their flunkys. "*Bon Dieu ? comme les hommes de lettres sont bêtes ?*" exclaimed Napoleon, who had a taste for rubbishy novels and such gushing poetry as Ossian's. That "shrewd coxcomb," Horace Walpole, author as he was himself, had no desire to parade in so ragged a regiment. A dandy of the day describes Sam Johnson as the "most disgusting voice and person you almost ever beheld." Lord Byron hated your author who was all author, "in foolscap livery turned up with ink." And his lordship himself would be unaware what a keen-eyed critic was at his side in Edward Trelawney, who after seeing a good deal of authors, lets out this account of them,—to which he notes his friend Shelley as one "grand exception."—"To know an author personally, is but too often to destroy the illusion created by

his works ; if you withdraw the veil of your idol's sanctuary, and see him in his night-cap, you discover a querulous old crone, a sour pedant, a supercilious coxcomb, a servile tuft-hunter, a saucy snob, or, at the best, an ordinary mortal. Instead of the high-minded seeker after truth and abstract knowledge, with a nature too refined to bear the vulgarities of life, as we had imagined, we find him full of egotism and vanity, and eternally fretting and fuming about trifles. As a general rule, therefore, it is well to avoid writers whose works amuse or delight you." <sup>1</sup>

|Surely it is not so bad as all that ; yet in truth your man of the world has had too much opportunity for forming a mean idea of authors. This is an old-standing reproach against them, their attitude towards the great. Plato complains of poets as too apt to be tools for a tyrant ; and Homer had a keener eye for the faults of Thersites than of Agamemnon. St. Gregory, who spoke so prettily of Englishmen and of angels, among his edifying works wrote most complimentary letters to more than one potentate whose actions he should have denounced as diabolic. Stern Dante, who put Justinian in paradise above better men, found in his hell an oasis for Saladin, quartered there along with Julius Cæsar, and other famous ancients whose own poets knew of no Elysian Fields unless for illustrious mortals. Here seem to be touches of the same weakness as tempted Shakespeare to seek a grant of arms, Scott to build a baronial hall, Voltaire and Beaumarchais to fig out their bourgeois

<sup>1</sup> This critical observer would not have liked to hear what Byron said of him—as reported by Finlay to Frances Power Cobbe :—“ If we could but make Trelawney wash his hands and speak the truth, we might make a gentleman of him.”



names with an aristocratic particle such as Goethe did not disdain at the hands of his princely patron.

At all events, ever since minstrels and jesters as well as chaplains made part of a nobleman's household, nay, since Virgil and Horace sang the praise of Augustus, and followed in the train of Mæcenæ, your ill-fed son of the Muses has been somewhat in danger of becoming a parasite. Spenser and Shakespeare fooled Elizabeth to the top of her bent. Dryden flattered Oliver, Charles and James in turn. Pope, Swift, Addison and the rest liked to correspond with St. James, were even proud to quarrel with ministers and courtiers; Gray hailed the cloudy "Star of Brunswick"; outspoken Johnson was civil to men of family, and picked his words before the king, in whom Fanny Burney could see no fault, though her small pension was so hardly earned. Other surly scholars have been noted as

rough to common men,  
But honeying at the whisper of a lord.

Moore and Sheridan sat gladly at George IV's board, where even Scott's clear eyes were dazzled by that bloated and befouled majesty. Poet-laureates of course are pledged to loyalty and laudation. But also the smaller fry of authorship have often shown an undue love of good society, when they can get into it. "Wenham" and "Wagg" play toady to a marquis, if no longer content to wait in his ante-chambers. Gigadibs is proud to sit at wine with a bishop, when not invited by a duke. The gentleman whose address used to be Grub Street E.C. has been noted as alternately a bit of a sloven and of a fop, but he will always put on his best coat and his clean shirt for the Lord Steyne's dinner table or Lady Fanny Flummery's rout.

If we are to trust an enemy's caricature, Thackeray himself in his salad days hankered after such invitations. The cynic Carlyle, too, went willingly among nobility and gentry among whom his wife, like Tom Moore's, seems not to have been made at home. It is the old tradition of the guild, among whom affectations of gentility are so infectious that some authors have shown themselves painfully ashamed of a humble origin, ashamed even, like Congreve, of the trade that brought them into society. The truest poet himself is not above taking one small boon at the hand of wealth and power—

“Ich singe, als der Vogel singt,  
 Der in den Zweigen wohnt,  
 Das Lied das aus der Kehle dringt,  
 Ist Lohn der reichlich lohnet;  
 Doch darf ich bitten, bitt' ich eins;  
 Last mir den besten Becher Weins  
 In purem Golde reichen!”

Making a drop from the pomp of chivalry to the *roman bourgeois*, one recalls a Fleet Street coterie—long ago gone to keep company in the shades with Tullus and Ancus—whose excursions from Bohemia were bounded by the castle of a certain *nouveau riche*, playing the patron of literature. He had the misfortune to be very deaf, and those not invited to his hospitality declared it to have an *amari aliquid* in that none of the witty guests could be seen to smile without danger of finding a footman at his elbow with paper and pencil on a silver salver, by which the stale jest might be passed to their host.

There is something to be said in defence of this apparent weakness of flattering dependence alternating with touchy readiness to take offence at the Lord Chesterfields and Horace Walpoles of this world. The

author's business is to know all sorts and conditions of men. It is but too easy for him to enter huts where poor men lie, and the doors of the middling class are often open to him ; then shall he not take his hardly-won chance to spy on the manners of the rich and powerful ? He feels as an exile in this world of base realities, so willingly lets himself be entertained by its princes, whose choicer fare he can cheat his taste into taking for nectar and ambrosia. His fine ears are more open than another's to the Siren strains of the upper circles. His common lot having been a kind of starvation, he has a natural curiosity for the opposite extreme. He can so well relish the leisure, honour, refinement that seldom come his way. For once to drink good wine in a golden cup may be a temptation too strong for his self-respect. His observant waiting on the givers of such boons began, did it not ? in honest admiration for feats of strength and courage beyond his own scope, and only in time became degraded by contemplation of the good things won by such qualities. At one end of the story we have the prowess of Achilles and the adventures of Ulysses ; at the other the ducal upholstery which made a modern fairy tale for the author of *Alroy*. Your philosopher in his tub may pride himself on making cynical estimates of transitory greatness ; but the poetic gaze turns readily to conspicuous figures, either looming in the distance, or filling the eye close at hand.

The worst of it is when he whose gift is for fabling, tells conscious lies to earn the guineas and the dinners of his patron, or lashes himself up to such half-conscious lies as will be expected of him on occasions of triumph or mourning. One likes Burns better when among ranting cronies he is tasting the barley bree that also sapped his manhood, than when he is intoxi-



eating his genius into hyperboles of gratitude to a lord, at whose table, on another occasion, he sat sulky for want of the civil notice that seemed due to him.

The bridegroom may forget the bride  
Was made his wedded wife yestreen ;  
The monarch may forget the crown  
That on his head an hour has been ;  
The mother may forget the child  
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee ;  
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,  
And all that thou hast done for me !

But mark this, that while the author in his hours of ease would fain lie soft and fare fatly at the expense of the few, when the call comes he seldom deserts the cause of the many. The voice that speaks most loudly through him is on the side of the people. For a moment flattered by the attentions of "Yon birkie called a lord," he soon remembers how "a man's a man for a' that." His heart goes with the "squire of low degree," who makes the right hero for his love-romance. Whatever he may hope from the kings of this world, he can speak for them no word but what the Lord puts into his mouth ; and not Balak's house full of silver and gold tempts him to curse the blessed of heaven. The minstrels of Rome were no doubt bound to celebrate Claudian and Fabian prowess ; but from them Livy must have got so much to tell of plebeian virtues. Show him any case of cruelty or injustice, and the true-bred poet's manners have not that repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. When speaking from his tripod, he is bound to be on the side of the angels, however in uninspired hours he may flatter mortal bigwigs. Voltaire was vain, spiteful, jealous, fond of mischief and scandal, as greedy of money as of court favour and renown, yet this heart-

less snob, as he might seem in many aspects, "often enjoyed a pleasure dear to the better part of his nature, the pleasure of vindicating innocence which had no other helper—of repairing cruel wrongs—of punishing tyranny in high places." Rousseau was a thief, an idler, a hanger-on, a reed shaken with every wind of temper, yet he stirred millions to stand up for the rights of man. Another morbid mind, Cowper, helped to bring contemporaries back to sane and wholesome ways of nature. Coleridge left his wife and family to be cared for by others, but he preached to edification on many grave texts, as this, "he prayeth best who loveth best." George Eliot taught an austere gospel to her generation, albeit herself taking another wife's husband. So the author's actions may be contemptible, questionable or hateful, while yet his words peal forth a high *vox humana*, thrilling our hearts as with the music of the spheres.

The same inconsistency appears in the author's relation to what is called politics, a subject as to which he proves often ill-informed or indifferent on its practical side : sometimes, like Goethe, he is found oddly lukewarm amid a glow of patriotic emotion ; but again, like Scott, he blows the trumpet lustily for a native land ever so stern and wild. Often his political views are like Froude's, whose servant characterized him as a Liberal when the Conservatives were in office, and a Conservative under a Liberal government. Men rather than measures master his heart to love or hate : Browning and his wife were both keen Liberals, yet the one extolled Louis Napoleon as extravagantly as the other detested Gladstone. History is strewn with examples of how the man of words wrecks himself when called on for deeds. He is apt to be a laudator of the Past, one of his favourite commonplaces

being a loving look back at that golden age that never was on sea or land, when under Saturn men lived innocent, content and at peace, till death came to them welcome as sleep. Yet, in spite of himself, he is moved to be a prophet of the Future, picturing it with colours of hope, left behind in Pandora's box for his special endowment. Perhaps he is no more inconsistent than other men in revolutionizing his formal opinions between youth and age, as Wordsworth and Southey began with dreams of fraternity and equality but ended as sound adherents of John Bull's Church and State. But all along he has his eye more or less steadily on the best aims of the world, not on its baser policies ; and he would soon fall dumb, had he not good words to speak for heartening his fellows in their struggle after growth in righteousness. He is a dynamic rather than a static force. Yet while he utters the oracles of Apollo, his own private opinions, if he cherish any, may count for so little that students of Shakespeare can still wrangle whether his sympathies went with Catholic or Protestant, with the White Rose or the Red, with the old or with the new, the best likelihood, indeed, seeming to be that the reformation that fostered his genius was looked on by him rather as a stepmother to his common mood. Those who knew Browning in the flesh differ as to whether he were an Agnostic at heart, or truly saw "reasons and reasons" for keeping his seat in chapel. Milton and Dante, to be sure, make no secret of their convictions ; but so much the less were they great poets as taking a side in the controversies of their time.

It is human nature to take a side, steadily or fitfully, in controversies that last beyond our time ; we flock together for pasture as goats or sheep, and can't even play a boyish game but under some assumed colours



of red or blue. Men have a natural leaning towards optimism or pessimism, turn for light to Rome or to reason, are unconscious disciples of Plato or of Aristotle, hot admirers of Dickens or Thackeray, of Pope or Wordsworth. It looks as if authors, for their part, had a dreamy trick of playing off-side, or even kicking for both sides as the spirit moves them ; but it is the weaker side on which they kick more heartily, for what in the long run is like to be the winning game.

A contemporary poet lays down as a fact that every child is born a "little Liberal or else a little Conservative ;" but grown men often turn out somewhat childish in making a mess of their avowed principles. One need not look far to see Tories catching at rash innovations ; and Radicals blindly reverencing a leader or a cry. A better division of human nature in its attitude to progress, would be as *Whats* and *Whys*, parties that as yet make no marked figure in history, though its course is regulated by their conflict. One of these parties asks sedulously *what* is said or thought, *what* is believed, *what* is done in this world ; and its obedience to custom and tradition has for reward the largest share of what worldly goods are going. The other appears moved to ask rather *why* is this or that said, thought, believed or done, and its portion is more likely to be all sorts of ill-usage, from cutting to crucifixion, at the hands of more contented contemporaries. As gifted with inquiring minds, authors are almost bound to stand among the *Whys*, but for whom we should all be savages to this day, wearing the oldest patterns of tattoo and nose-rings, eating our grandfathers as a sacred duty, robbing and being robbed by our neighbours as matter of course, and worshipping Mumbo-Jumbo instead of Mrs. Grundy or whatever other idol dominates our tribe. That pregnant ques-

tion Why ? asked by reformers at their peril, leads on to Why not ? then the Columbuses of the old world need some imagination as well as seamanship to guide and hearten them in the search for shores unseen by the bodily eye.

In practical navigation, to be sure, the author often shows himself a lubberly greenhorn. His mind is like a top-gallant sail that catches the first breath of whatever fresh wind may stir his environment ; but he commonly wants the experience of everyday life and affairs that qualify him to take a trick at the wheel. He seldom knows how to steer for those Utopias that by and by melt into a cloud ; then he readily changes his hopeful mood for one of despair or helpless disappointment. He has no patience with the tacks humanity must make on its voyage to a New World. His own weakness is often betrayed by the vehemence with which he calls out for a strong captain to rule the blatant crew—"aristocrat, democrat, autocrat, . . . what care I ?"—whose first act of authority might be to put talkative persons in irons. Or another temper ends by lapsing into professed indifference, exclaiming with Theo Gautier that he cares not whether he be ruled by the sword of a Bonaparte or an umbrella as bourgeois sceptre of Louis Philippe.

In our day the prevailing airs are vague stirrings after socialism and democracy, coming from a quarter of the compass which some take for heaven, others for its antipodes. We see how those breezes catch many popular writers, setting them adrift from the anchorage of old faiths and conventions. We might note also how they fail as pilots by taking their own mobile artistic temperament for a standard of human nature, and exaggerating the evils that loom so darkly over

their shifting horizon. They themselves fret under monotonous drudgery ; they kick against social laws ; they help themselves to other men's wives when tired of their own ; but they hardly understand how the average man makes the best of bad jobs, goes out daily, wet or fine, to his work, and comes home to be fairly content with his wife and kids, cutting his coat according to his cloth, and taking life as it comes with the grit and growling good-humour that hitherto have been John Bull's most notable virtues.

It appears indeed as if our solid and stable national character were altering, for better or worse, passing from stolid homogeneity into a more heterogeneous and restless state, reflected by poets and novelists who are first to feel and express the change. New sympathies awake among us, even a morbid sympathy with crime as well as misfortune. Old virtues are discredited, old lamps of life are exchanged for new ones ; dammed-up faith flows into stagnant pools of superstition, where it cannot burst out in shallow eddies of fanaticism ; and the main drift of such movement, as its cross-currents, backwaters and over-flowings, we may look for in the pages most welcome to our generation. It may be but a flaw of wind that fills this or that trim sail ; the sea-breeze from one quarter may shift in turn to blow off the land ; the upper and the lower air may stir in different directions ; swells, catspaws, and ripples die out in the shadow of the craft to which they give " a short uneasy motion " ; then at times it seems as if all the blasts of Æolus were let wildly loose for wreck and ruin ; yet the welter has a general tendency that some day will be marked as the spirit of our age. And, for good or evil, popular authors make at least the vanes that show how the winds veer, while some less popular may play the part of beacons



warning us, perhaps in vain, to keep clear of wave-washed rocks.

Nay more, the best authors shape as well as reflect the spirit of their age. They set the course which practical men must steer, sooner or later, with more or less good-will. They keep the state moving from ideal to ideal, leaving to clear-eyed skippers the task of finding landmarks in precedent after precedent. Your rough tar is better at reading the compass and noting the signs of the weather ; but it takes a cloud-gazing dreamer to hitch the vessel to a star. It is when he undertakes to handle the ropes, or breaks down after a short spell at the pump, that the dreamer may not show himself a handy man.

“ We live by admiration, hope and love,” says a great author ; and on his fellowship falls the duty of feeding man’s spirit, than which is no nobler office. But to themselves may come a blight in handling holy things as a matter of trade. Their stock consists in words, ideas, emotions rather than in the facts of life, with which they are often too little conversant. Feeling without acting must be an unhealthy exercise. I was instructed by my nurse that every tear shed means a drop of blood lost, which may not be sound physiology ; but had she been a psychologist, she might have observed that a weak nature fatally drains itself away in fine emotions, while even to the strong there is danger in the artificial manufacture of sentiment, which often proves a canker on honest manliness.

The paradox of Diderot has it that an actor should not himself feel the emotions he imitates, which indeed in acting would, if real, overwhelm the words of his part ; yet we are told Macready played Virginia better for the death of his own daughter. However this

may be with actors, it is not so with authors. It was more so of old when imagination shaped statuesque figures of classical clearness in line and relief, not romantic pictures of light and shade lit up by coloured windows rather than by open sunlight. As the enthusiasm of romanticism ebbed into realism, naturalism, or however may be styled the school that looks to earth rather than to heaven, authors are found concerned to mirror their own moods in their views of life, and do not so often find here a pleasing reflection. Goethe boldly opposes classicism and romanticism as health and disease, a text which seems to be thus expounded by J. R. Lowell—"Modern imaginative literature has become so self-conscious, and therefore so melancholy, that Art, which should be 'the world's sweet inn,' whither we repair for refreshment and repose, has become rather a watering-place, where one's own private touch of the liver-complaint is exasperated by the affluence of other sufferers whose talk is a narrative of morbid symptoms. Poets have forgotten that the first lesson of literature, no less than of life, is learning to burn your own smoke; that the way to be original is to be healthy; that the fresh colour so delightful in all good writing, is won by escaping from the fixed air of self into the brisk atmosphere of universal sentiments; and that to make the common marvellous, as if it were a revelation, is the test of genius."

In our time, does not genius tend too much to be introspective, morbid and insincere? The more a man considers himself rather than the world around him, the more he is prone to be deceived. Some of our recent novelists have been very conscious of this weak point in the artistic nature, so hatefully revealed, for instance in Alphonse Daudet's *d'Argenton*, the

vain, self-indulgent philanderer, crossed with an ill-tempered cynic, whose motto for others is *La vie n'est pas un roman*, though he has not the moral energy to write his "Daughter of Faust" nor to practise his own *Credo de l'Amour*. Thus it is that authors help to perform their own anatomy, sometimes more instructively than is done in formal biographies.

It has already been pointed out how literary tombstones erected nowadays follow a fashion of presenting few but flattering epitaphs, as was by no means the rule in old graveyards of reputation. Memoirs seem almost bound to be complimentary, all the more since, as often as not, they come to be written of men still alive to correct the proofs. In our generation indeed the biographer is expected to champion his hero through thick and thin, while it is the way with fond readers to work themselves up to such a heat of admiration that they resent any attempt to dull the halo of their beatified author. So I fear to stir a hornets' nest in declaring that the *advocatus diaboli* would seldom find it hard to show the most beloved poet at least no better than the average man; and about the greatest we have hints that they often showed the defects of their qualities.

Of Homer we know nothing, except that his rival fellow-citizens must have waited for some time before claiming the honour due to his birthplace. Horace does not care to conceal faults winked at by worldly wisdom. Seneca, usurer and philosopher, wrote very moral maxims while in exile, it is said, for an intrigue of which the less said the better. Nero, who made such havoc among contemporary authors, was himself a most awful example of the artistic temperament. Marcus Aurelius seems an exceptional case of blamelessness, unless for shortsighted indulgence to



the faults of his family. We cannot censure Dante if his life's work made him lean ; but he could never have been a very genial personage whom an admiring contemporary describes as haughty and ungracious in manners, and who owns to envy among his besetting sins, while indeed he had some right to look down on his rivals. Chaucer, on the other hand, must have been only too sociable with Wives of Bath, Hosts of the Tabard and such like, to get material for some stories he was sorry for in the end. Shakespeare, of whose inner life we glean so little, may be also guessed at as keeping bad as well as good company : to be so familiar with Falstaffs and Bardolphs, he must surely have spent too much time in the taverns of Bankside and Stratford, even if it be not true that he died of a drinking bout, after showing himself a hard creditor and a faithless husband. His ill-wisher, Robert Green, wrote moral warnings as well as plays and "love-pamphlets," but the most edifying of his works is that *Repentance* that on his death-bed accuses himself of inordinate drunkenness, gluttony, whoredom and profanity, considerations which John Bunyan took in time to whip the offending Adam out of him. Austere Milton does not seem to have commanded so much domestic affection as did his Adam ; and beneath the stately swell of his organ music, we catch jarring strains of controversial Billingsgate. It is an ungrateful task even to suspect that the great ones of old were not all we should like them to be, as to remember how Villon and too many other poets down to Verlaine were frank scoundrels. Carlyle, true to his hero-worship, would have us bow down before time-honoured idols as cast in solid metal from top to toe, and understand that feet of clay are the fashion of a degenerate age ; but more to be trusted seem the

scriptures declaring how as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be with human nature.

Alas! the nearer we come to our literary heroes, revealed in an age of not yet faded documents, the clearer we see them in unheroic attitudes. Pope, poor fellow, had his good points, but was spiteful and crooked in mind as well as in body. Swift was a good hater and a very questionable lover. The elegant Addison was almost as fond of his bottle as kindly Dick Steele. The moral Johnson must be owned to have been lazy, greedy, slovenly and overbearing. Coleridge was a moral wreck. There are queer stories to tell about Hazlitt, who, in his *Liber amoris*, plays the eaves-dropper on himself. The Rev. Charles C. Colton, absentee vicar of Kew and surreptitious wine-merchant, who so much edified our grandfathers by a collection of sententious maxims entitled *Lacon*, came to contradict the most impressive of them by his end as a gambler and suicide. Châteaubriand, who wrote so movingly about the genius of Christianity, did not well illustrate this theme in his character. Carlyle scowled at a weakness in Charles Lamb, as to which gentler critics have no answer but charitable silence. Shelley—but indeed we have had enough of “chatter about Harriet.” We may not know all the truth of Byron’s mystery, but we see into it so far as not to be edified by the “pageant of a bleeding heart” he dragged before the public, at home and abroad, when he owned to Hobhouse how his naturally quick feelings had been “all absorbed.” The author of *Faust* played the devil with several Gretchens’ hearts. The blameless Wordsworth gives one the impression of being too self-satisfied. The one author of that period who stands out as a full-blooded man, not without his human weakness, but wholesome, honest and kindly

as if he were no genius, is Walter Scott, the most *totus, teres, rotundus* statue in our gallery of literary fame. With him too Carlyle had fault to find, who began in his moorland solitude by extolling authors as a modern priesthood, but, once introduced to their metropolitan temple, wrote in splenetic haste, "Of all the deplorables and despicables of this city and time, the saddest are the literary men. . . . I have hardly found a man of common sense or common honesty. They are the devil's own vermin." And Diogenes might find failings in himself by the light of his own lantern !

We need not come down to names of our generation, when I myself have known more than one edifying author sent to prison through vulgar crime. For evidence of the indictment, see such documents as Disraeli the Elder's *Quarrels of Authors* and *Calamities of Authors*, quarrels shown to be unduly exasperated, and calamities too much the fault of those they befell, farcical tragedies commented on by this voluminous bookworm with a profusion of illustrative instances. "What a moral paradox, but what an unquestionable fact, is the wayward irritability of some of the finest geniuses, which is often weak to effeminacy, and capricious to childishness ! while minds of a less delicate texture are not frayed and fretted by casual frictions ; and plain sense with a coarser grain is sufficient to keep down these aberrations of their feelings. . . . Those who give so many sensations to others must themselves possess an excess and a variety of feelings." In a word they may carry too much sail, and not always enough ballast.

For further illustration, the reader may search Disraeli's erudite volumes. His unsparing exposure of authors seems so far deficient in that he has little



or nothing to say about authoresses, a word banned by literary purists, but the thing exists and can no longer be treated as a mere "curiosity of literature." In his firmament, a woman-writer was still a rare phenomenon. From the days of Sappho, hardly such a meteor appears till those of the Empress Eudocia, then of the Princess Anna Comnena; and ladies swimming into the ken of literary annalists up to the nineteenth century are usually noticed in virtue of being queens, at least duchesses or abbesses, as well as scribblers. Vittoria Colonna seems the first modern authoress in her own right. But since Queen Margaret of Navarre, Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Mary of Scots took to wiling away hours of captivity by writing stories or verses, if only with a diamond on a window pane, a monstrous regiment of Amazons has rushed into the field, at first as single spies, but now in battalions, claiming review among the inky ranks.

If the present writer have followed his precursors in hitherto ignoring the sexual anatomy of authors, it is for want of subjects, without having recourse to vivisection. Till recent days women, unless perhaps in France, were not much given to be autobiographical, while the accounts of them rendered by men had often an effect of flickering between flattery and scandal. "The pen has been in their hands!" sighs Jane Austen, before whose day only a Lady Jane Grey or a Dorothy Osborne here and there gives us chance disclosures of maiden meditation. Mrs. Hutchinson's memoirs put her husband in the foreground, before herself; Madame Roland's are bloodshot with the heat of her time; Madame de Genlis shows more of an author's weakness in an overweening conceit of her own talents and merits, less evident to her contemporaries. The

heiresses of Sappho used even to be rather ashamed of their character as bluestockings, taking authorship as a trait needing apology, and hushing up the sensibilities in which they must have exceeded the lot of common womanhood. Instances are wanting, then, for dissection of the authoress, unless carried out on fictile models like the Blanche Amory of Pendennis. But now that in every newspaper we hear of the "new woman" struggling to burst loose from the stays and skirts that swaddled her freedom, from another generation we may expect a crop of memoirs that will take the public for father confessor. Already, we have several self-revelations of the kind from the Continent, such as Marie Bashkirtseff's *Diary*, and Sonia Kovalefsky's *Souvenirs*. But indeed the voluminous life history of a George Sand tells us hardly more than do the confessions of her many romances, reflecting *Sturm und Drang* periods both of her own life and her country's. And on our side the Channel, George Eliot, for instance, has in the first part of the *Mill on the Floss*, in her *Brother and Sister* sonnets, and elsewhere, given us *mémoires pour servir* for an autobiography of her young days, as did Charlotte Brontë in her novels. One could easily name half a dozen ladies of our time, whose books are so many peepshows into their *vie intime*. Perhaps more than one of them, if they told the whole truth, might own, like Madame de Staël, that they would barter literary renown for the commoner gift of beauty, or, like poor "L. E. L.", that they found celebrity a poor exchange for domestic happiness.

A singularly frank confession is presented by Mrs. Lynn Linton's *Christopher Kirkland*, which in the form of a novel sets forth the author's own autobiography, doubly disguised by a change of sex. But, however

she may puzzle the reader by mixing up real names with aliases, a woman's heart constantly betrays itself under the assumption of doublet and hose ; and this half-feigned fiction makes a valuable document for studying a literary career. The book deserves to be better known than it is for its extraordinary picture of the crowd of acquaintances among whom the author fell in her youth, reformers, revolutionists, freethinkers, free lovers, secularists, spiritualists, fanatics of unbelief, philanderers with enthusiasm,—like one Sibyl who “was a kind of palimpsest of all the crazy faiths that float about the world,” her latest being “always her final revelation,”—moral Bohemians, many of whom she found not only flighty and unsettled, but also thoughtful, kindly, cultivated and conscientious, albeit “the ordinary theological writ of the depravity of the human heart did not run among them.” In such society, a generation before our theosophies and morbid humanitarianisms, that orthodox squarson's daughter got her head and heart scraped clear of the “superstitious white-wash plastered over them,” to become a dogmatist turned inside out, hardened to a somewhat critical and cynical temper, veined by erratic streaks of sentimentality.

I have a recollection of this lady that throws a flash of light on her prolific authorship. In St. Peter's at Rome, we were standing beside a tomb that illustrates a woman's sufferings in child-birth, which seemed to move her strangely. She had been expatiating on a favourite subject, the faults of man : “I have tried them in every relation of life—but one—and I have found them false in all !” Then she turned her head, and I know not if she meant me to hear what she sighed out aside—“I never had a son !” Those who knew that accomplished controversialist, whose novels



are less a holding up the mirror to nature than an arguing with circumstances, those who saw how heartily she tried to be a mother to another woman's children, can have little doubt that had she had children of her own to rear, she would have fluttered less fiercely certain dovecots of her period.

Here appears a hint why the authoress is sometimes not so much of an author, who, after publishing works in flesh and blood, has been observed to be henceforth less concerned with the writing desk than with the perambulator and other motherly cares: not that this rule always holds good. The male author, for his part, is not always strong in the duties of a family man, the reason perhaps being that his affection often goes out more fondly to the creatures of his imagination or his labour. He has been known to leave his real offspring hungry, to let his own character go ragged, while he hung lovingly over the works, stunted or deformed as they might be, that were produced with travail of mind and spirit known only to himself. Every book he brings forth he would fain have acknowledged as the finest baby ever seen, that prodigy of every-day occurrence among actual births. This paternal *storge*, indeed, varies both in kind and in degree. There are authors with whom it lasts little longer than the unfledged period till the youngster be out in the world to take its chance; others, like Balzac or Herbert Spencer, may all their lives hang anxiously and correctingly over their mental offspring.

Among the woofullest tragedies of literary life have been the death of such infants in the cradle, or their overlaying by some heavy chance, as when Carlyle's manuscript of a volume of the *French Revolution* was burnt by John Stuart Mill's maidservant. Another such tragic case, where a naughty schoolboy took

the part of malignant fate, is shadowed out in one of Farrar's school tales. Many Goths and Vandals must have played Herod with luckless authors' bantlings since the days when the Roman soldiers, flushed by lust of destruction, burst into Archimedes' study. A Niobe among modern authors appears to be Sir Thomas Urquhart, translator of Rabelais, who kept his manuscripts so closely under his wing as to take some trunks full of them to the battlefield of Worcester, where they went to light the pipes of Roundhead troopers, while their parent was laid by the heels in the Tower; but Cromwell proved kinder than Artemis, for he gave back one remnant, dearest of all to a Scots writer, as enabling him to trace out a pedigree that showed him one hundred and forty-third in direct descent from Adam. And consider the agony of those authors, who with their own hands have had to stifle their darling progeny, or to stand by and see it committed to the flames, to save the afflicted parent from himself figuring in some *auto de fe*!

The she-bear robbed of her cubs, the eagle defending its nest, the fowl brooding over its eggs, the cat licking her kittens, are all emblems of the author's parental fondness for the book by which he is to live after death. Such love seems not always shown in proportion to the sturdiness of the offspring; rather the puny and the deformed may be chosen for darlings. Shakespeare was apparently as careless of publication as of wedlock, who left a second-best bed to his wife, and his plays to who would print them. He perhaps valued his sonnets more, yet he could not more surely have hoped immortality from "this powerful rhyme" than did poor Percival Stockdale, not the only despised rhymers that has believed his fame set on adamant foundations. There may be poets among us to-day

who bear up against contemporary neglect in fitfully certain hope that their names will rise from the dead.

Literary memoirs are too thickly packed with warning examples for authors, great and small, who do not always fail to lay them to heart. Their besetting sins are correctable and often corrected. Many of them will be found not without common sense to pick their way through the world, even when they have means to outsoar the "owl-winged faculty of calculation," as Shelley belittles it. If not by a sense of awe to keep them in their right place as regards infinite greatness, they may have the luck to be schooled by a sense of humour, which implies an eye for proportion. Ill-disciplined, self-absorbed, and given to deceit in the way of business as they are, we yet find them after all turning out not infrequently dutiful citizens, good family men, and respectable church-goers in spite of all temptation to the contrary. But enough has been said to mark the author as liable to peculiar moral infection, so that to be a good man, he would need to be more of a man than other men.

Tanto più maligno 'e più silvestro  
Si fa il terren col mal seme e non colto,  
Quant' egli ha più del buon vigor terrestre.



## IV

### AN APOLOGY FOR AUTHORS

So much as to the anatomy of authors, as revealed in their own works and by the observation of unsympathetic critics. But rather than insist on defects, in satirizing which an author may be conscious of fouling his own nest, I prefer to dwell on excuses and explanations for the faults found in this character that in vain has such a good chance of presenting itself to advantage. Let us take the blots on it one by one, and see how they may be accounted for by much dipping into ink.

Mrs. Lynn Linton, who knew them both, and what was thought of them in their circles, tells us that Thackeray, the satirist, was the more generous, unsuspicious and sympathetic, while Dickens, the sentimentalist, had "a strain of hardness in his nature," which certainly came out in his dealings with publishers, and perhaps in his long bargaining with this lady for Gad's Hill. Anthony Trollope was an impetuous person, rather robustious in his manners, and apparently very ready to make up his mind; yet how much does he dwell on heroes shilly-shallying between two bundles of matrimonial hay, and on the fine-drawn scruples of heroines who hardly know what they would be at. Tennyson was gruff, moody, somewhat coarse in his tastes, by no

means "faultily faultless" in a temper which yet he was able to transmute into shining ingots of courtesy, charity, and purity coined as verse that enriches the world. His rival Browning struck chance acquaintances as more a man of the world than a thoughtful poet. These examples, culled from the most eminent laurels of one generation, all point the same way. In the reading of literary biography, Walter Scott and Charles Lamb seem exceptional instances of men whose books were closely akin to themselves. When we turn to the sons of sister Muses, we find again that the sweetest strains and the finest forms may come from natures not beautiful or melodious as their works: take Turner and Wagner as examples. Inconsistency seems to be the most common flaw in the artistic temperament.

I myself, as a kind of author for well-nigh half a century, cannot but have known or known about many authors in my time, not indeed of the first class; and what has struck me in most of them is how unlike they were to what one might expect of them. The refined poet had coarse tastes in private life. The urbane essayist was apt to be rude and bumptious. The humorist that tickled two continents was a bit of a bore in conversation. The keen critic was a hog of Epicurus' sty at table. The earnest moralist used very bad language. The passionate romancer had married for money. The satirist of the great was a bit of a toady; and the novelist of smart society dropped her hs. The singer of a joyous life on the ocean wave was sometimes afraid to cross the Channel. The gusher on domestic affection bullied his wife and children. The despiser of money, in print, had a sharp if not always clear eye to a bargain. The pensive pilgrim through life was ludicrously vain.

The Socialist champion of horny-handed toil loved champagne when he could get it, and would fain have been trusted by a tailor. So, too, the writer of scandalous stories might be a paterfamilias irreproachable in any suburb; the glorifier of crime worked diligently in his office hours; the chronicler of gory adventure came punctually home to tea. Some authors I have met whose life seemed more in keeping with their pages, but often one is disappointed in this respect; so that, when one admires a book, one comes, after experience, to be less eager for the acquaintance of its begetter, than was the way in one's confident youth. Distance rather lends enchantment to that view.

Can we find an apology, or at least a reason, for such inconsistency? Is it not natural that a surface hardly reflects the same rays as it absorbs? Will not a reflective spirit exalt and envy the qualities it half-consciously lacks? Opposite states of feeling attract each other, as the mobile and turbulent Athenians looked approvingly on Spartan discipline that had cost them dear. A tall man and a dumpy woman feel themselves well matched. Johnson was true to a "Tetty" who needed a good deal of idealizing. Goethe found his affinity, or one of them, far beneath him even in conventional rank. The brooding Hamlet took to his heart the firm-minded Horatio. Wolfe is said to have exclaimed that he would rather have written Gray's "Elegy" than be the conqueror of Quebec; perhaps the poet, brooding in his draughty college rooms, thought what a fine thing it might be to strut a major-general.

That was a rhetorical question vainly put to Mæcenæ: how does it come about that men, not content with their own lot, are apt to hanker after



that of others ? But it is only in imagination that the soldier would be a merchant, the citizen a farmer : should some god appear to grant their desire off-hand—*licet esse beatiss!*—they stand silent, they shrink away, each on his beaten path. The author, for his part, can prolong his dream, and with gain rather than loss, if only in repairing the defects of nature. More or less aware of being an Osric, it pleases him well to take the robust part of a Laertes ; wedded happily to a paragon of virtue, it tickles his lower nature to toy unsuspected with some Fife at the fair ; liable to rheumatism and catarrh in the flesh, he the more rejoices to defy the elements vicariously in the person of his hardy hero ; in the body being slow of speech, he has the greater satisfaction in attaining eloquence on paper. We can all be ourselves any day, but the maker of airy shapes can be another, and often by choice takes a shape not his own.

“ Much he imagined : somewhat I possess ! ” quoth Bishop Blougram, belittling Shakespeare’s life in comparison with his own. But that sophistical prelate’s trip across the Alps might well be spoilt by gout, avalanches, restive mules or what not, while our poet’s flights of fancy were enjoyed at his ease, and after all he could settle down in the “ trimmest house in Stratford town,” to make himself none the less snug for having had towers and gorgeous palaces at his will. Blougram did not forget that among the many parts a poet could play in his mind’s eye was the bishop’s own, easily exalted to a cardinal’s, which would be just the sort of part an unbelieving and unreverenced author might choose to play as a change from the vexatious realities of a garret haunted by printer’s devils. And of all the characters he presents,

the one he is least acquainted with may be sometimes his own real self, an amalgam of so many.

Have I not said enough to outline some reason for incoherency between the man and his book? A more serious reproach against him is inconstancy in his affections. The poetic nature is bound to be somewhat chameleon-like, apt to change colour from its surroundings. I once knew an author so much wrapped in imagination that one could guess at what he was about by the fashion of his dress. When he went attired like Mr. Hobson Newcome in the plain, solid style of a country squire, one understood him as engaged on some Conservative organ, concerned to defend landed property and our old institutions. Again he would go decked out in all the elegance of fashion, so as to be suspected of a literary excursion into smart society. But when he wore squashed sombrero and loose neckgear, presenting a mixture of the flamboyant and the ready-made, one made sure of him as having dropped into poetry or art criticism; and one has even met him seedy and down-at-heels, as if conscientiously enacting the stock part of the hack-writer out of luck. This hint I leave to be enlarged on by some second *Sartor Resartus* expanding the Philosophy of Clothes. The point is that while an author may not have many suits to trick himself in according to his mood of the moment, it would seem as if more than other men he wears his heart upon his sleeve.

There is a general impression abroad that the poet does not shine as husband and father, that the mistress who gets the warmest sonnets addressed to her eyebrow is most likely ere long to find herself neglected or forsaken, that the darlings who figure as angels in print run greater risk than other children of being

whipped and sent to bed on the slightest provocation. Against the fine things authors have been ready to say about their loves, must be balanced mean acts recorded in too many scandalous cases. Burns, Coleridge, Shelley, Hazlitt, Byron—let some *Leporella* undertake to complete the catalogue. In the *Credit* column, let us not forget to add up the peaceful households of Wordsworth, Southey, Tennyson, and a hundred more such, that could be quoted from any Biographical Dictionary. Yet scientific works will bear out the experiences of every kitchen-maid that what kindles quickest is like to burn out soonest, leaving only smudge and smoke before the duller fuel has got well aglow.

To judge the unconstant author more indulgently than is the practice of the Divorce Court, let us remember what a tricky sprite is this Ariel that leads him so often astray. He is much the slave of moods that seem to come and go at the wind's will. So long as it blows steady from the west, it minds him of his Jean ; but when it sits in another quarter, he can vow with all his soul—

Never ranging, still unchanging  
I adore my bonny Bell.

The south wind again may well bring to memory some Mariana that in that direction sleeps forgotten and wakes forlorn ; but as it shifts about, his responsive heart becomes aware how dark and true and tender is the north. Like a weathercock, he stands exposed to all airs of sentiment. Love, that is the common citizen's holiday delight, is a leading line of the poet's stock-in-trade. He becomes apprenticed to sighs and raptures, as another to tools or ledgers. One of his first necessities is to find a *Dulcinea*, whom



a glowing imagination, untempered by callow judgment, hastens to fit with a jewelled veil and decks her with charms beyond the means of prosaic wooers. When *Dulcinea* comes home to him for better or worse, familiarity soon wears out her trousseau as a goddess, and the disillusioned swain may not appreciate her talents as a housekeeper. Some of the most lasting, at least the most long and loudly proclaimed attachments of poets have been to ladies beyond their reach, as wives of other men, or safely beatified in Paradise. One can guess how, had things been otherwise, *Laura's* sense of humour might have been keyed so as to jar with her husband's, or *Beatrice* might have tried him by her different standard of sound church principles, and *Astrophel's Stella* might have sniffed at a habit of smoking taught her swain by Sir Walter Raleigh. Perhaps the author is happier for wedding none but the nymphs of his imagination; and many authors have had the sense to recognize how marriage is for them more of a lottery than for laymen. Some, to be sure, have drawn a lucky lot in a housewife of no particular charm or talent beyond kindness and common sense, gifts complementary to his own, so as to cushion for him the observatory from which he watches for his starry *Delilahs* and *Dulcineas*.

The more eager the man of feeling is to embrace his ideal bride, the more disappointed will he be when he misses those airy perfections with which his own imagination invested her under hawthorn shades and on flowery banks with the sun in their hopeful eyes. After waking from love's young dream, all wedded couples have something to get over in settling down together for every-day life; but the poet has more than most. The mere fact that his work lies much at

home is unfavourable to domestic harmony. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, if it be only from breakfast till dinner-time. The cares of shop or office sharpen a man's appetite for the welcome that waits him at that bower where a bride's love may be whetted in counting the hours till his train from the city. Thus Adam and Eve wisely agreed to divide their labours—

For solitude sometimes is best society,  
And short retirement urges sweet return.

This Darby's work lies a good deal within his own doors ; and perhaps it is as well for Joan not to see too much of her husband at his business. She has a general licence to be inconstant, coy and hard to please ; but the nature of this man's occupation goes to set his nerves on edge and to wring his brow with megrims not always medicable by the gentlest ministering angel. His dream of caverns measureless to man may be shattered by the want of a button on his shirt, or his glimpse of an Abyssinian maid playing on a dulcimer vanishes beyond recall at the rate-collector's knock. Just as he has caught his rhyme, he is called away to study a rash on baby's arm ; the fount of imagination may be tapped by the chill actuality of a leaking roof or befouled by a smoky chimney. Sheet after sheet of copy is flowing from his fountain pen, till he has at last got the hero on his knees to pour an impassioned appeal to Angelica, when the Angelica of real life opens the door to ask if it shall be leg of mutton or loin of veal—"Aroint thee witch !"

As I was carving images from the clouds  
And tinting them with soft ethereal dyes  
Pressed from the pulp of dreams, one comes, and cries :—  
"Forbear !" and all my heaven with gloom enshrouds.

And when baby after baby enlivens his home, it may echo with carols and choruses that cannot fetch a price per thousand yells to pay the doctor. Pity the poor author whose idyll must be worked out upon a homespun tapestry, and who is sometimes tempted to try a palimpsest on a pattern of which he has grown weary ! It cannot be denied that authors are apt to become selfish. They have to spin their webs much out of themselves ; then the fly entangled in this precarious network is like to be less of a mate than a victim. Hence many tears published as the story of *Elle et Lui*, to which may be retorted the tale of *Lui et Elle*.<sup>1</sup>

Sappho seems to have been more fortunate than

<sup>1</sup> So far I had written at a venture of impressions, when I had the luck to read a magazine article by Mr. Sidney Low, who has taken the trouble to work out the question in figures. He enumerates some seventy of our distinguished authors, from Shakespeare to William Morris, as to whom can be stated more or less certainly their "condition as to marriage." Among them he finds that twenty-five are not known to have married ; twenty-three committed matrimony without making happy homes ; and only a score, giving two or three cases the benefit of a doubt, "lived in ordinary content and comfort with their wives." The last head might have been added to, had he taken into account American authors, or subtracted from by calculations made across the English Channel ; but the other two would contain a good many women writers, left out of his list. As a practical cause of so much domestic unhappiness, he blames the "literary habit" rather than the "literary temperament"—your author is too much "about the house." Had Carlyle had to be out of the way from ten to four in an office, he and his wife might not have "got on one another's nerves." This considerate writer also anticipates one of my suggestions : "not all wives would resist interrupting the composition of an epic by deferring till the late evening the announcement that the cook was drunk, or that the kitchen boiler had burst ; and not all authors would accept the interruption in the right spirit."



Socrates, in that it did not come to a marriage with the commonplace, unresponsive ferryman whom she idealized so imaginatively, for his sake, if tales be true, snubbing the more distinguished suitors that may have revenged themselves on her coldness by tainting her with unnatural affection. Yet, had she made a match of it with Alcæus, might she not all the same have taken that fatal leap in which her example has been followed by how many an unmusical maid? The conditions, to be sure, seem not so unfavourable in the case of an authoress who gives her hand to a fellow-author. This case, apparently somewhat rare, suggests a happy union of interests as well as souls, in the notable example of the Brownings, both, indeed, personalities of blood and judgment so well commingled as not to make pipes for fortune's finger to sound what stop she pleased. One thinks also of Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, of the Howitts, of the Cowden Clarkes. As for mortals married to a Muse, I incline from personal observation, but without statistics, to credit them with a frequently steadfast attitude of admiration for the divinity that may bring a valuable asset into the matrimonial settlement. Poor "L.E.L.", George Sand, and Mrs. Lynn Linton rise in mind as leading instances to the contrary; but one has sometimes been touched, now and then bored, by faithful marital worship of a not always appreciated genius, seeming to make her Tithonus, too, immortal with a kiss, so that the earth-born husband was well pleased to be known as henchman of his wife, to fetch and carry for her gladly all their lives, to advertise her in season and out, and jealously to guard her tripod from draughts, duns or other disturbing visitors. On the other hand, I have known more than one author spoilt by a

wife whose adulation made too congenial society for him, petting him up into a futile hermit.

Even the politest ordinary visitors, take notice, may be moths and cankers of this life. The author's house is his office, as well-meaning friends forget when they drop in just to see how he is getting on. There are authors who have to spend an hour or two in getting up steam before their pistons and wheels of imagination will work freely ; then all that time may be wasted by an interruption of three minutes. Not every historian can tranquilly pursue his task, like Dr. Arnold, with his youngsters chattering and gambolling about him. Mrs. Beecher Stowe, as a novelist, appears to have had the same happy faculty. I forget the name of an exceptional author that could best cloister his mind amid an uproar. Was it not Charles Maturin that used to stick a wafer on his forehead as a sign of his being in the clouds and not to be spoken to ? I have seen a would-be genius staring up to the ceiling for an hour or so, all his well-schooled family sitting silently around, and the visitor, too, was expected to look on in hushed reverence—*ſœnum habet in cornu* ! I once knew a voluminous author who, living ten miles out of London, hired a room in town for his writing, but would not tell me where : if I understood him aright, not even his own household was trusted with the clue to this labyrinth.

There seems some want of economy in that the hermits of old had not means, taste, or encouragement for turning their abundant leisure to account as authors. The common doom of this penance is solitary confinement. "The man of letters," says Froude, "lives alone, thinks alone, works alone. He must listen to his own mind, for no other mind can help him. He requires correction as others do ; but

he must be his own schoolmaster. His peculiarities are part of his originality, and may not be eradicated." So the poor man has some reason for his aloofness from a chattering world, if he is to help it to chatter. What with his sedentary habits and his keen nerves, he is very apt to have a bad temper, and needs a "growlery" in which to cage himself when the wind is in the east, like Dickens' "Boythorn"—said to have been modelled on a famous author. We have seen Alfieri's confessions as to his fits of fury. Ugo Foscolo, we are told, used literally to tear his hair and fling the pieces about the room, when he had been beaten at chess. Such want of self-restraint seems an inheritance from the greatest of their line, for Boccaccio describes the austere Dante as provoked to throw stones at mocking children. But we need not go to excitable Latin peoples for examples of a weakness too often displayed by stodgy British authors, when matters do not turn out to their mind.

By fits and starts, though, the author may prove boisterously or effusively sociable, flying from himself and his airy fancies to rub up with real flesh and blood, sometimes in vulgar revelry, though those there be that like Antæus draw fresh strength rather from the bosom of their mother-earth. These latter may be called the temperate authors; others are, or have been more ready to mix their Helicon with less ethereal liquors. Even in our decent day there are poets who too much haunt the shrines of Bacchus and Ceres. Our late laureate, *de facto* if not *de jure*, made a daily pilgrimage to a public-house on Wimbledon Common. I remember a very diligent litterateur who kept his den with notable regularity, but once a week punctually treated himself to a sort of devil's Sabbath, taking an excursion into town with frequent halts,



of such result that his friends described these holidays as "going on the war path." One inclines to suppose, without statistics, that the weakness hinted at is more common among journalists than real authors. I have put the point to an experienced adventurer in Fleet Street, who rejects my suspicion with the cryptic remark, "He would be *fired*"—in which this ready writer used more classic English than he perhaps knew, quoting Shakespeare's sonnet to wit—

Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

One has known journalists who were often "fired," yet could rise from their ashes like the tormented souls in Dante's *Malebolge*. Another authority informs us of a revolution in the morals and manners of Fleet Street, come about in the last dozen years. The baser sort of pressmen, at least, till lately clung fondlier to the rites of a Bohemianism that had debt and drink as its sacraments. The strain on the newspaper man is more constant; and he has more pressing temptation to gear up his machinery by applications of fusel oil. What a wear and tear is that of the mind bound to feed the looms and shuttles of the daily press, by day or night, without the glow of interest or novelty to cheer a monotonous task! The solitary craftsman, doing work that delights him, at his own hours, taking his time to touch and retouch, has a better chance of despising artificial stimulants. But the lordliest poet, too, may come to rot in the dungeons of that false enchanter, the *Duessa* that so fatally imitates *Fidessa's* fitful inspiration. It proves so easy to emend one's life with what for the moment patches a ragged and threadbare imagination. Here is a glass to make the world's outlines clearer and brighter to an eye dulled over ink and paper. All

the associations of wine are romantic ; and how well it has been advertised by the poets ! Oliver Wendell Holmes—who in his festive Ode as revised by a Temperance Society, has given us “backward mutterings of the spell reversed”—shows how it takes a poet to bring out all the flavour of wine, that indeed may flush the dullest mind with an evanescent glow.

Beneath these waves of crimson lie,  
In rosy fetters prisoned fast,  
Those flitting shapes that never die,  
The swift-winged visions of the past  
Kiss but the crystal's mystic rim,  
Each shadow rends its flowery chain,  
Springs in a bubble from its brim,  
And walks the chambers of the brain.

In the consulship of Plancus, I dealt with a poet as wine merchant, Sydney Dobell, to wit, who at Cheltenham carried on this prosaic business along with that of a Coryphæus in the so-called “spasmodic school” of poetry, turned into such ridicule by the author of *Firmilian*. In his double character, Dobell made a speciality of classical wines : it was doubtless scandal that represented a consignment of these exotic brands as delivered at the back door in the solid form of English apples. I confess to having cultivated a sympathetic taste for his “Hymettus” and “Falerian”, not approved by more mature judgment. Horace's favourite tippie, if I remember right, tasted not unlike Australian Burgundy, and had so much body that one did ill to quaff it, unmixed, in true heroic measure ; but the wine of Hymettus, once uncorked, went sour so soon that it invited to drink deep or taste not that Pierian spring. Since then wider experience has taught me that Greek wines often smack of resin, and that those of Italy, as we

get them, are not always pure juice of the grape. But all vintages of the sunny south bring a *bouquet* of sentiment exhaled from lyric and idyllic allusion—

Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth.

The coarser fumes of John Barleycorn appeal not less flatteringly to patriotic or traditional chords strummed on by famous writers ; and I know a country where one native spirit has been almost consecrated by genius.

Wi' tippeny, we fear nae evil,  
Wi' usquebae, we'll face the devil !

The devil, alas ! is not so lightly to be faced. For my part I may not take a Pharisaical view of his victims to this dear delusion. I confess to having drunk good ale, like a jolly post-boy, even though it did not agree with me, at the instigation of Kingsley and Borrow ; but before imagination tempted me far on that slippery path I was brought up with a round turn by an inward monitor that lassoes one's conscience in the lithic acid diathesis. If ever I were tempted thus, I should have eloquent advocacy for temperance at hand in the recalling of how often, during half a century of converse with men of the facile "artistic temperament," I have seen noble spirits adulterated, clear minds clouded, and strong hearts shattered by a curse that insinuates itself in the guise of a blessing. Many well-rigged lives go to wreck beyond repair on that reef hidden beneath such sparkling waves ; while others, more happy, are hailed by well-wishers as staggering off to put about, and stop their leak, and spread their sails to another wind that brings them after all safe and sound to port.



A generation ago, an old friend of mine, William Sawyer, then well known in Fleet Street and on the lower slopes of Parnassus, told me how his father had taken him to the studio of an artist, whom they found in a state of intoxication that seemed chronic. As they came away, the careful father told his boy that he had shown him this man as a Helot, by way of beacon against wasting rich talents and bright prospects on a vice which then seemed like to cut short his life. The artist was George Cruickshank, who lived for two generations more, to be famous as a fanatical champion against his old enemy, "the Bottle" !

Such an artist, one supposes, has a better chance of pulling himself up on this smooth descent to Avernus, since intemperance brings swifter and more signal ruin to one whose hand must be steady as well as his head. Literature offers too many warning cases like that of Edgar Allan Poe, or of "bright, broken Maginn." But if the author has often fraternized with an enemy that would steal away his brains, let us remember how little may go to his head, if taken on an empty stomach. Even a dose of flattery will intoxicate his responsive nature. And as to the fatal habit to which the like of him has too often given way, I would again quote wise words from a favourite author of mine, who was at once poet and physician.

The creative action is not voluntary at all, but automatic ; we can only put the mind into the proper attitude, and wait for the wind, that blows where it listeth, to breathe over it. Thus the true state of creative genius is allied to *reverie*, or dreaming. If mind and body were both healthy, and had food enough and fair play, I doubt whether any man would be more temperate than the imaginative classes. But body and mind often flag,—perhaps they are ill-made to begin with, under-fed with bread or ideas, overworked, or abused in some way. The automatic action

by which genius wrought its wonders, fails. There is only one thing which can rouse the machine ; not will—that cannot reach it ; nothing but a ruinous agent, which hurries the wheels awhile, and soon eats out the heart of the mechanism. The dreaming faculties are always the dangerous ones, because their mode of action can be imitated by artificial excitement ; the reasoning ones are safe, because they imply continued voluntary effort.

(O. W. Holmes, *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*.)

Enough of a weakness less often depicted by the pencil than by the pen, as in the most tragic of Trollope's *Editor's Tales*. Gormandizing seems not such a common snare of this temperament, being here contra-indicated, as doctors say, by feeble stomachs and lean purses. Authors, who more often have Daniel's pulse for their daily portion, are seldom unwilling on occasion to sit at good men's feasts ; but food does not inspire them like wine. Homer, to be sure, can gloat over hecatombs and the ensuing "equal banquets ;" but Circe's island smiles not for the modern poet's frugal fancy. He chooses rather to celebrate such cates as the "savoury fruits" and "dulcet creams" which Eve set before that "affable archangel." The romancers are no milksops, yet their tables do not often groan under more savoury dishes than barons of beef and venison pasties. There is an exceptional amount of choice eating and drinking in Peacock's lively novels ; and Dickens keeps Christmas with much good cheer. As for those Gargantuan suppers of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, they may be taken as largely stage-banquets. Christopher North, in the flesh, came to penitential abstinence in his latter days. One of the last of that crew of revellers was his son-in-law, Aytoun, who wooed and won a bride labelled by her father "with the author's compliments." I pointed to him a little way back as the pseudonymous author of *Firmilian* ; and I might

have said that he was a preceptor of my youth, when he appeared a monument of a more convivial generation. Among fellow-students were the late King Edward and his brother Prince Alfred, in whose time a wicked and probably false rumour passed among us youngsters, that our Epicurean professor, being bidden to an evening with his princely pupils, fasted all day to relish the feast the more royally, but at the palace was regaled with tea and bread and butter.

Another of my instructors was the genial Greek professor, who scored off his impudent disciples when he, having chalked up the notice "Professor Blackie cannot meet his *classes* to-day," one of them rubbed out a letter, leaving the word *lasses* till the ready-witted senior, with a whisk of his plaid, turned it to *asses*. I could tell less well-worn stories of that scholar and poet, more clearly illustrating the freaks of genius, as for instance how one day in reading with his class some chorus from a Greek tragedy, he astonished us by breaking out—"Poor stuff this!—I once wrote a translation of it, that was better than the original. What are you making that noise about—it was much better, as you shall hear!" Thereon he dived off the platform into his sanctum, brought back the book, and the rest of the hour was passed, not ungratefully to idle Grecians, in reciting his own verses. Blackie had his weaknesses, but he shone among authors as following Aristotle's virtue of a mean in the enjoyment of good cheer; also as showing the classical wisdom of self-knowledge when he described himself as "an excitable gentleman of such agility of limb, such eccentricity of sentiment, such explosiveness of passion, and such volubility of tongue."

Blackie kept the tradition of the elders only in



flowing locks like "Christopher North's," and the Ettrick Shepherd-like plaid in which he draped his customary suit of black. His thin and smooth-shaved face had rather an ascetic effect: "a beard does not suit my style of beauty" he informed his class. But to one of his fellow-professors, fate had been spitefully unfair. This was a reverend signor, grave and godly, as befitted the subject of his prelections, kindly and genial, too, while temperate in all things, yet it must have been a thorn in his flesh that he displayed a nose like Bardolph's to stir misconceptions in those who knew him not. By his day, Bacchanalian rites no longer seemed becoming in professors of Moral Philosophy and the like, while they were still honoured among a band of editors and authors, whose names are not yet forgotten in Edinburgh, nor always in a wider sphere. Of their revels in latter day "Noctes," I could tell some queer stories, but "not before Mrs. Boffin." One of them, a man who made his mark on the world successively as quarryman, preacher, professor, able-editor and member of parliament, has left a fragment of autobiography, in which, recording the first time he tasted whisky, he drily adds a reflection that it would have been better for him had this been the last time.

*Quo musa tendis?* I had been discussing the creature comforts of authors, when thus gone astray into mere anecdotage. But another reminiscence crops up to the purpose, how forty years ago or more I sat a fellow guest with R. H. Horne—the poet who published his epic *Orion* at the price of a farthing, as a practical jest on a long-eared public—and how with secret scorn I heard him expatiate on delicate flavours of choice tea, a beverage then known to me only as the rank infusion that seemed fit for

women, and for children, when well sweetened. I have changed my mind and my taste since then, and know what Horne meant by denouncing the cup of that day as good neither to cheer nor inebriate. Many authors have taken kindly to tea, as to the coffee that at one time baited their common places of resort. As for tobacco, one need hardly say how dear it is to a race that loves to have its head in a cloud, and is not averse to an excuse for idleness. In our generation, princes have backed poets to bring into fashion this gentle vice. The finest of fine ladies would no longer affect such ignorance as is shown, in one of Robertson's comedies, by the hostess of a Bohemian author when he drops a pipe in her drawing-room, and the footman is rung for to sweep it away. Laurence Oliphant has the credit of introducing cigarettes among us after the Crimean war that brought England in rude touch with the near East. I saw a play of Robertson's the other day, which had that war for its date, but in which all the gentlemen smoked freely before ladies, unconscious of their anachronism. Actors seem to take cigarettes for a grace of elegant life, while authors, I think, are more at home with pipes: they certainly cannot often afford cigars. The first time I ventured to appear before my father with a cigar in my mouth, I came delicately, like Agag, not quite knowing what he might say of it; but all this old cigar-smoker said was—"I should advise you to take to a pipe, which does not cost so much and you will like it just as well"—advice which I hand on to prudent youth.

But enough of such a smoke-dried subject! If we are to linger over confessions of opium-eaters, and the slavery of other strange stimulants, this apology for authors may read too much like an accusation. It

seems a painful fact that the working of the imaginative faculty may sometimes depend on throwing wholesome nature out of gear, as in Schiller's case by wine, and in Balzac's by the coffee which Voltaire's long life showed to be at least for him a slow poison. Schiller is also understood to have been strangely stimulated by the smell of rotten apples. An artist in another sort sought to provoke nightmare fancy by supping on pork chops. Byron stooped to gin; and he can tell how soon he ran through his noble birthright in feverish wooings of the Muse.

There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,  
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;  
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek alone the blush, which fades  
so fast

But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past.

The author perhaps takes to smoking as a sociable carrying-off of his silence in company, where he has often less to say than might be looked for. "The conversation of a poet is that of a man of sense, while his actions are those of a fool," rashly quoth Goldsmith, of whom it was said that he "wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll." Was it Johnson, or who? said that a genius might be able to draw for a thousand pounds, yet not have small change in his pocket. Many eloquent writers have been noticed as unready or stammering in talk; some have even passed for glum and sullen; a common case is being liable to frosts of silence, thawed easily by genial voices. Perhaps if they kept much company with other authors, they had learned to store their good things *in petto*, else in danger of seeding for another man's garden. Perhaps they sit tired of giving out, willing rather to take in. On the other hand it has been noted of brilliant conversationalists that their



sparkle may disappear when they try to fix it on paper. Macaulay seems an exception, and so was Sydney Smith, who said of him that he talked like a "book in breeches." But no rule can be laid down for relation between the fluency of voice and pen. Sometimes grave and thoughtful authors have been noticed as chattering like magpies in their hours of ease; while skittish humorists may prove more apt to hold their tongues. The comic Muse is not always a jovial companion; and he who stirs laughter in others may be as heavy of heart as that clown recommended by a physician to take a tonic in his own performances.

Whether they shine in company or no, authors have always been much seen at public places, gymnasiums, forums, taverns, coffee-houses, tobacco-parliaments, Vauxhall Gardens, clubs and so forth; then the inconsiderate are apt to set them down as an idle crew. The creator of airy nothings, indeed, cannot be always at his desk. His work must often be done by spasms, sometimes by half-unconscious processes that ripen through hours of careless gossip as well as in lonely idle saunterings.

The Muse, no poet ever found her,  
Till by himself he learned to wander  
Adown some trotting burn's meander  
An' no think lang.

The more delicate his craftsmanship, the more such a one depends on times and seasons for plucking his flowers with the dew on them, or catching at shy fancies that flit by tender shades of twilight. In broad daylight, he may pursue his ideal in vain, but no sooner does he lie down to rest than he finds it clasped in his arms. For hours and days, his mind

blots and scratches like an ill-working stilograph ; then of a sudden his thoughts come flowing faster than they can be set on paper. The muddy dribble of to-day becomes to-morrow the Nile flood rushing from unseen sources, that may flow by before he can dam it up and turn it on to his thirsty fields. He may hunt for weeks after some elusive shape of fancy, till lo ! all unawares he finds it full blown to his hand, suddenly revealed like an evening primrose. The moral is that the prudent author should study his means and opportunities, using up uninspired hours for the more mechanical parts of his work, as Rousseau, by way of *travail de manœuvre*, copied music, and Spinoza polished optical glasses for a livelihood he could not make out of lenses for other men's minds. Any experienced servant of the Muses can learn how to take the cream off his thoughts, and set aside the skim milk for marketable uses. Southey boasted his ability to turn from one task to another, letting his various faculties lie fallow in rotation, and so fully filling up a long working day with different subjects that it might well be asked when he had time to think. Wordsworth composed verses in walking to set them down at leisure by the fireside, as Milton rolled out long-linked harmonies in his mind to wait the chance of an amanuensis. That counsel of perfection, indeed, implies a well-breathed memory which is not always the imaginative mind's strong point. Is it possible that a verse which has moved generations of hearts, a thought that still sparkles like a jewel on the finger of time, was once in its chrysalis state pencilled on a poet's shirt cuff, or pocketed in a knot on his handkerchief !

Now if any man of so-called business accuses the author as idle, has he ever considered what a hard

slavery it is to be one's own master ? Other sons of Adam are driven to their tasks, so made easier ; they have to keep hours, to catch trains, to copy what is prescribed them, to sell what is asked for, to see patients and clients who will not be kept waiting. The author, for the most part, is left to put his own machinery in motion, and can turn the steam off and on when and how he pleases. He has no employer, except the public, who as often as not will readily forgive him for being idle ; he has no assistants, as a rule, though Dumas, who at the worst must have been a monster of industry, is said to have had a good deal of work washed in for him by mercenary hands, when it has been calculated that the mere handwriting of his countless tomes was too much for the waking hours of a lifetime. No boy in buttons can be trusted to open one's door to the Muses, if they kindly call. Early or late, the author has to catch his Pegasus, perhaps by shaking a publisher's sieve of oats in its restive ear, to saddle and bridle it for himself, before he can ride to market with his fragile wares. Bellero-phon, it will be remembered, had experience how hard this winged steed always was to mount, till he got a leg up from Athene. Pegasus may prove particularly hard to catch after being out at grass too long. Only when they are both young and fresh does his mount run neighing to meet the poet. And the sorriest jade of a Pegasus may be most ready to kick up its heels, when its unmasterful master has a headache after sitting up too late the night before—but nay, that is hardly so in all cases, for rude health and sound sleep seem not always favourable to the hectic fever he counts as inspiration. Then, once set on the back of his more or less mettled steed, after a prelude of shying and jibbing, the author may whip and spur



it so furiously, that the half-starved beast comes home foundered or broken-winded ; and his reckless rider has for a time to content himself with pedestrian paces.

Dr. Johnson declared that any man could write if he only sat down to it doggedly ; but that great bear, after he might suck his paws on a pension, did not much illustrate his own doctrine. The outside public, for its part, rather sniffs at a genius setting itself up above the old rule about *invita Minerva*. Anthony Trollope in his autobiography confessed to business-like methods of industry, which appear to have cost him much of his favour with novel-readers. Yet they should have considered how the more spirited and high-paced Scott, also, put himself into regular harness to break the back of the day's work before breakfast. Thackeray, on the other hand, seems to have dawdled over his work, forced to bring it up with a rush at the last moment. Milton thought he could woo the Muse to advantage only in winter. Some poets, on the contrary, sing their best with the birds in spring, while Rousseau, for his part, found his imagination provoked by dull surroundings, *moins riant quand tout rit autour de moi*, so could paint blossoms by the fireside, as Moore is said to have been stimulated by an English winter for the glowing scenery of Lalla Rookh. Some insurgents against nature are most wide-awake when they ought to be in bed ; others keep regular hours, like Kant. One might expect to find Harriet Martineau in the latter class ; but I have talked to a bucolic neighbour of hers who was scandalized to see her roaming the hills at night. Some seem most readily haunted by ideas in the dark ; perhaps, like lazy James Thomson, write their descriptions of sunrise snug under the blankets. Milton and Alfieri were

inspired by music as De Quiney by opium. Some put their best foot foremost in a panting spurt, while some cover more ground at a steady tramp, or a careful crawl. Zola, like Trollope, set himself a daily task, so many pages of so many words. *Tam o'Shanter* is said to have been dashed off in a day or so, while Sam Rogers hung over his highly veneered verses for the Horatian nine years. Flaubert might have picked out words for a cancelled paragraph or so in the time it took Harrison Ainsworth to spur Dick Turpin's ride to York, a hundred pages done at a heat in hardly more hours than he gives for that fabulous exploit. Some writers feel miserable while not at work ; others require long intervals of hibernation, in which their genius lives on its own fat. Men differ in such habits ; but it were a wholesome rule for young authors not to lay the blame of their own idleness on coy Minerva's back.

The creative mind has its cryptic processes as well as its not always forecastable seasons for budding, flowering and seeding. There have been authors who persuaded themselves that they could not write except with certain implements, in certain attitudes, even in certain costumes. There are many who cannot spin a verse or a paragraph unless pen in hand. Goldsmith tried dictation, but gave it up in despair, and dismissed his amanuensis with a guinea. But I knew an industrious story-teller of our time who kept two shorthand writers at work, one up and the other down. Some sons of Apollo are so fortunate as to be able to pour forth their thoughts through a type-writer, as easily as Orpheus extemporizing on his lyre. Some flounder to firm clearness over a bog of scrawlings and blottings ; others, like Scott and Shakespeare, seldom blot a line of their manuscript. Some win to land not without

struggling in the breakers of type, a feat little admired by their publishers. Before the day of proof sheets, Virgil told of himself that he brought forth his verses like rough bear-cubs, to be licked into shape by parental pains. Balzac, after altering in proof perhaps a dozen times, could still find plenty to weed out of his printed volumes. Some pens flow their smoothest on folio sheets neatly ruled and margined ; one writer indulges his genius with thick quires of cream-laid post, in this or that tint ; another, like "paper-saving Pope," jots down his verses on the backs of odd scraps. I have heard of an author who professed to get paper for nothing by taking one share in a Rubber Company, then dozens of such poured in upon him their prospectuses, the blank pages of which were suitable for MS. Dickens' blue ink and paper were notable ; and Rousseau wrote his novel on gilt-edged quires tied up with blue ribbon. Buffon, it is related, could not write his best unless in full dress with all his decorations on to inspire him.

While on this head of ways and means, let me repeat a very practical hint I once got from Grant Allen, who suffered from writers' cramp, which he attributed to the constant use of such devices as fountain-pens, bringing only one set of muscles into fatiguing use, so advised his fellow-craftsmen to try varying their tools. The quill that is the author's crest may in our practical age take the form of a lead pencil. The most economical pen would seem to be the sharpened finger-nail of an oriental letter-writer, who works in no keen need for saving time. In writing, as in other tasks, the more haste may prove the worse speed. A biographer states that Ruskin could write "anywhere, on anything, with anything," but admits that such ready writing proved hard reading



for the printer. As for ink, the author must dip into his heart's blood for the most fluid and indelible script.

Does the unsympathetic layman ever reckon up what pangs go to the conceiving, the gestation, the bringing forth of even a weakly book, not to speak of the care and anxiety with which it must be reared from the swaddling-clothes of manuscript, and sent out on its feet to face dubious fortunes? A little experience of such pangs, not common to all minds, might call forth more charity towards that self-satisfaction with which the author is often taxed. Conceit should be born like a caul with every child of the thankless Muse. He will need it as a bladder to bear him up on the sea of troubles in which his destiny sets him tossing against wind and tide. The labour, the pains, the risks, through which a book is brought to birth, could seldom be borne by son or daughter of Eve, unless as heartened by love and admiration for a mental offspring that may even strike the parent and partial friends as the finest birth the world has yet seen. The topic is such a moving one that I must be suffered to mix my metaphors like Hamlet's in his most recited soliloquy. Every conscript in our army of martyrs carries a laureate's wreath in his knapsack, else how could he hold out through its first trying marches? At this stage, unless it be some fond relative or *fidus Achates*, he finds no one to believe in him, and must make shift to believe in himself. Looking back from a day of disenchantment, the mediocre poet may smile to see how he would never have started on that race but for some imaginary carrot dangling before his nose, some spur of future fame prodding him on round laborious laps, some garland at the goal to make him scorn the thistles that others take for guerdon enough. But his evident vanity,

remember, may be all on the surface, sweated out of him by laborious scampers, whereas other skins, sleeker and whiter to view, have their pores more clogged by dirt that would come off thickly under the hands of a shampooer.

There are two textures of good opinion of themselves which men display to the world. One is bumptious, insolent, defiant, thick enough to throw off all but the sharpest points of contumely. This is not the common wear of the author, whose looser woven motley, so easily going threadbare and tattered, makes a less serviceable defence against the weather. His vanity is apt to be of milder nature : it is often tame and timid ; so much so as sometimes to seem even modest : it turns a hungry look on the observer ; it crops from commons and hedgerows when fenced out of richer pastures. It is kept too lean for want of assurance, seldom starved outright, but still more seldom fully satisfied. When stuffed with praise like a Strasbourg goose, it still gapes for more with the appetite of an Oliver Twist. Its pleasures are not equal to the pains with which it has to pick up a precarious existence in prickly places. The most succulent mouthfuls are like dust and ashes, when it cocks a wistful eye on some tuft out of reach. All the patting of its kind patrons goes to the winds, as often as some mischievous urchin of a critic sticks his thorn-branch under its tail. The struggle for existence, to be sure, equips the poor author with a fleece of self-satisfaction that, by the tempering of providence, may grow again as often as cut away by critical shears. Yet this fell, however thick, is apt to prove a ragged cloak for a tender skin, into which burrs work their way, rankling the more sorely for his helplessness to rub them off. And the burrs hardest to get rid of are his recurrent

suspicious of himself that stick about him even as he raises his voice to let the world know what it might listen to, if it would.

Ach, die Natur schuf mich im Grimme !  
 Sie gab mir nichts—als eine schöne Stimme !

As for true pride, the man of letters, if not of the baser sort, has a good chance to find antidote for that mortal sin. An author of any authority must live in the light of great thoughts to which he cannot but refer his own ; he is in trade relation with great minds that should be the touchstones and models for his own workmanship ; he is fain to look before and after more intently than the layman, and in the very way of business seeks ideals far above himself. Imagination, where learning and modesty fail, may help him to some flash of revelation upon the unbounded darkness of time and space in which a human life so blindly takes itself as central point. Then the slightest sense of proportion is like to make him wisely aware, at least by humbling glimpses, what an insignificant atom in the universe is this particular psychide of carbon that shows his name on title-pages.

The author is charged with a trick of advertising his self-esteem by touches of the pride that apes humility. We know this mock-modest "we," and the devices by which "the present writer" avoids coming out with the shortest word in our language, always apt to be the most prominent in his thoughts. There was one popular author of our time, as to whose lucubrations it used to be jestingly told how his printer would run out of capital I's. But it seems a sign of good sense in our generation that the author no longer so much affects to keep himself in the background, hooded and gowned in some time-honoured peri-



phrasis. *Ego et rex meus* is his true grammatical style ; and his patron would be foolish to expect a show of false deference, as in the days when a sovereign had to be grandiloquently addressed not only as "high and mighty Prince" but as "principal Mover and Author of the Work," while the plainest citizen should be flattered as "the indulgent reader," the "intelligent public" or such-like.

Then we have all spied upon that way authors have of masking themselves under some alias, pseudonym, or other more or less thin disguise, sooner or later to be stripped off, unless in the exceptional case of a "Junius" or an *Imitatio* devotee who succeeds in puzzling generations, and echoing his renown by calling forth guesses at an invisible personality. There may be good reasons for wearing such a domino. A Veiled Prophet speaks more impressively in Khorassan or elsewhere ; and a "Thomas Little" does well to hide his face in putting forth verses he should blush for. Sometimes your "Plain-speakers," "Martin Mar Prelates" and "Peter Pindars" have had every excuse for not caring to set themselves in a pillory of publicity. There is a natural timidity, not ungraceful in young writers, which prompts them to make their first appearances as "Boz," "Titmarsh," or what not. Thus the new-made knight rode out to win his princess *incognito*, entering the lists with a blank shield that might by and by bear glorious blazonry. There was one veteran author well pleased to be "The Great Unknown" long after he had won his spurs. Among the female champions now pressing into these lists, many seem fain to own a literary Salic law by disguising their sex under a masculine pseudonym, *George*, it would appear, for choice, perhaps through some trick of unconscious cerebration suggesting the

idea of a husbandman. Much more rare, let the "New Woman" note, is the case of a male author choosing to pass for a she, as did "Fiona Macleod" with singularly mystifying effect.

Confusion has frequently arisen through authors bearing the same patronymic, like two poets of our day of whom one was invidiously distinguished as "of Parnassus" when the other styled himself "of Penbryn." The son of the first Lord Lytton did well to take the *alias* of "Owen Meredith," when the family name was already rather intricate. Balzac did not so well to write himself *de* Balzac, when another *sieur* of that ilk had been in the field long before him. Crébillon *père* may conceivably not desire to be confused with Crébillon *fils*. There were two Rousseaus of note, one of them well satisfied to emphasize his *Jean-Jacques* in contradistinction to *Jean-Baptiste*, and to a Pierre Rousseau who wrote what is now forgotten. Also there were two Corneilles, for one of whom it seems rather awkward that the other is the *Grand Corneille*. So in our day we have had the two brothers Daudet, of whom the more voluminous can laugh to quote himself qualified as *L'Autre*. A most extraordinary freak of fame seems to be in setting Winston Churchills to face each other from opposite sides of the English-writing world. Of *Dumas fils* it is wickedly told that, to his father asking "Have you read my last story?" he answered "No, sir, have you?"—the bitter jest here being that *Dumas père* was believed capable of giving his name as an *alias* for the work of some diligent ghost, such as that Maquet whose original patronymic seems to have been Mackay, and his origin of the same family, as, according to one author, sent soldiers of fortune to Troy, among them an Andrew Mackay, whose daughter

was married "on" Hector. Molière, we know, had for his real name Poquelin, which is said to have come from Fife as *Pockling*.

In Molière's vocation, an assumed name seems rather the rule than the exception ; but I am not sure if I can call actors in evidence to a character of modesty. When young and innocent, I once fell in with an operatic singer who named himself Campobello or the like, which was my cue for turning the conversation to Italy, till my new acquaintance bluntly confessed that he was at home in no country but one whose skies are not Italian. We must all admire the courage of artistes who come before the public to warble exotic strains under such native names as McGuckin or Thudicum ; but I don't see why we should blame an author who, happening to be registered in life as "Snooks," chooses rather to be known as "Seven-oaks," or even takes for himself a name of fine associations like "Norfolk Howard." One can conceive Bacon coveting the *nom de plume* of Shakespeare. In more practical lines of business than the arts, the pardonable deceit is quite common. Even your staid family lawyer may have succeeded to the firm of "Brown and Jones," his real name being Robinson ; and when Lady Clara Vere de Vere goes into trade, she imitates Miss Smith by taking some such style as "Clare" or Madame *Chose*, if her wares are to have a smack of Paris. May not scribbling Harry, then, elect to be Dick or Tom as he please, and to public convenience if there be already half a dozen Richmonds in the field. And poets, of all people, are aware that in the classic age men might be known to the gods by one name, and by quite another to mortals. It is romancers rather than poets, indeed, who affect pseudonymity in our time ; but where



should a touch of fiction be in place if not on the title-page of a story? What's in a name, is thus expounded by an author of common sense as marked as his contempt for sentimental affectation.

Fame loves best such syllables as are sweet and sonorous on the tongue, like Spenserian, Shakespearian. In spite of Juliet, there is a great deal in names, and when the fairies come with their gifts to the cradle of the selected child, let one, wiser than the rest, choose a name for him from which well-sounding derivations can be made, and best of all with a termination in *on*. Men judge the current coin of opinion by the ring, and are readier to take without question whatever is Platonic, Baconian, Newtonian, Johnsonian, Washingtonian, Jeffersonian, Napoleonic, and all the rest. You cannot make a good adjective out of Keats—the more pity—and to say a thing is Keatsy is to condemn it. Fortune likes fine names.

These are the words of James Russell Lowell, who had no cause to be ashamed of his *nomen clarum et venerabile*, yet may sometimes have regretted its superabundance of L's, and foreseen with humorous regret that it would not slide into the metre of any more stately "Fable for critics." Some American writers have little to thank their god-parents for in a Puritan commodity of "given" names. Phineas T. Barnum seems well enough suited with his, but hardly so Timothy Dwight or Nathaniel P. Willis. "Mark Twain" sounds more fit for a household word than Samuel L. Clemens; nor might C. F. Browne have moved laughter so readily as did "Artemus Ward."

While on the head of American authors, let me recall an experience illustrating the awkwardness of two or more authors bearing the same name. O. W. Holmes in one of his "medicated novels" has an amusing episode of a young man who, visiting an austere deacon, declares his favourite author to be Scott. The deacon's reading is much in Scott the Commentator, so

he conceives a good opinion of his guest as weaned from the frivolity of youth. Both of them being at cross purposes, the visitor mentions *Ivanhoe* as in his opinion Scott's best work, and quotes from it a passage—"When Israel of the Lord beloved" etc. which sounds so scriptural, that his host borrows this hitherto unfamiliar volume of the great Scott. Next day, being Sabbath, the deacon does not appear at church, an absence portentous enough to bring the minister on a visit of inquiry; and he finds his truant sheep deep in the clover of *Ivanhoe*, which he reports to be most interesting, though he has "not come to the scheme of salvation yet." Now much the same mistake I made one Sunday, when wishing to spend a pleasantly reflective morning in a college garden, I took down from my host's shelves the poems of Holmes, then lazily turned over several pages before discovering that I had in hand a synonymous author of less fame. *Holmes* might seem no very abundant name, yet in the London Library Catalogue it figures with some three dozen entries.

When the public is so fond of peeping under their pseudonyms, of playing Paul Pry with their private concerns, and sometimes so impertinent in requesting their autographs, authors might well be astonished at their own moderation of self-esteem. One has seen a comfortable scribbler whose conceit was rather like the fur of a well-fed cat, throned before a snug fire of home life, purring complacently when stroked by some soft-handed critic on the hearth. But in most cases, as already shown, we need not grudge this animal the thin and ragged skin of conceit in which he shivers under cold blasts, and kicks against the pricks of fortune. No wonder if his temper be noted as uncertain. He starts at shadows; he takes

offence at trifles ; he sulks obstinately ; he does not go well in harness ; he makes a great noise about nothing. The author of a cookery-book may be imagined as placid, stolid and eupeptic. But the general run of authors have earned a name for being bilious, quarrelsome, jealous, moody, suspicious, surly, resentful, in a word ill-conditioned. Other men's business trains them to a more good-humoured practice of give and take. This man's nature is to love the bowls more than the rubbers of his lot. As a sharp-tongued jester, he smarts under gibes thrown back. As an earnest preacher, he looks askance at a rival pulpit. He is bored, or worse, when another lion in his own line gives a louder roar. He bears, like the Turk, no brother near his throne, if he have one. He damns the performance not his own with faint praise, and with civil leer assents to the general applause. Well if he do not yawn rudely or look at his watch ostentatiously, while the other artiste is taking his turn. Hence arise heartburnings among a race whose nerves are always apt to be on double edge, and whose keen sympathies and antipathies seem both set on a hair-trigger. Then the author's ill-will does not fail for a weapon at hand. Common men, when the police forbid fists, have little else for it but to grin and bear their wrongs, soon forgotten in the press of outdoor life, after being perhaps exhaled in a hearty curse or two for which the injurer is not one penny the worse. The author can sit at home to nurse his grievance, which, unless held in by a sense of shame or humour, he has means of proclaiming. His art is a gramophone to interpret such records. So when angry, he has the temptation to unpack his heart with words, like a scolding shrew. The restraints of modern life, indeed, oblige him to pick and choose his bad language,



to sharpen it into a shining epigram, and to deliver it with a biting smile ; but how authors used to bawl against each other in the days when a man's soul seemed damnable for his erroneous view of irregular verbs ! In our days such rancour seems oftener to take the form of impaling one's offender in stuffed effigy, as guy or villain of a novel. I could cite instances, but forbear : the sooner such spiteful tricks be forgotten, the better. The most cold-blooded effort of spite in our own time, was when a literary gent contrived to fake on to the pages of a book in the British Museum a slander anent his dead enemy, whereby the honest Dictionary of National Biography was deceived.

It may appear that in all these apologetic strictures, the author is being likened to a woman, not, *bien entendu*, the new woman who studies science, plays hockey, and scratches policemen, but that proverbial daughter of Eve about whom poets, moralists, and historians have been in the same tale of *varium et mutabile*, perhaps as beholding her weakness with " the fatal eye of an accomplice." Great men, we are told, derive more from their mothers than their fathers. Waiving this contention for want of accurate statistics, I would inquire whether the creative nature have not an essential feminine strain, as shown in its receptivity, its sensitiveness, its less fitness for the rougher tasks of open air life. In its proneness to vanity, to jealousy, to caprice, its quickness to take offence, and to harbour spite, does it not show some relation to the spindle side of humanity, as well as in nobler qualities of sympathy, impulsiveness and readiness for self-sacrifice ?

Too often the author appears a bit of a weakling, infirm in frame as in temper, crooked like Pope, lame

like Byron, paralysed like Heine, not to speak of the cropped ears, slit noses and other maimings and mutilations inflicted on him by the tyranny of man. From Homer downwards, the race have been apt to go blind from too much study, at the best to stumble through life blear-eyed or shortsighted, with vision clearer for colour than for form. Most of them see the world through the spectacles of books, that may increase rather than correct deficiencies of natural eyesight. Not so many of them have been at home in out of door work and sport, unless it be such a contemplative recreation as angling, or such light labour as the plucking of grapes and rosebuds, that can be distilled into a certain amount of copy. The fingers deft to strike the lyre, may prove all thumbs in handling the axe or the hoe. The bard who so loudly celebrates bloodshed beholds it with most exultation from a safe distance, or if he trust himself near the fray, he leaves it sooner than the feast, his shield perhaps *relictâ non bene*. His very gift of imagination keeps him awake to risks upon which the dull clown marches stolidly as bidden. Shining exceptions rise to mind in rebuke of what may seem a slander—Socrates, Xenophon, Froissart, Sidney, Carl Theodore Korner; Thucydides and Cæsar could both write and fight; Achilles touched the lute when sulking in his tent; David was a man of his hands as well as of psalms. But as a rule, one fears, hard knocks would stun poetic enthusiasm.

When wide of soul and bold of tongue,  
Among the tents I paused and sung—  
Far off the distant battle rung.

There is often, indeed, an hysterical strain in the literary character, which betrays itself by rising to a

shriek when it affects to roar and growl. Witness Carlyle, who in so many volumes extolled silence as golden, never tired of robustiously glorifying strong, patient men, but amid his dithyrambic praises of self-possession and his scoldings of imbecility, the crowing of a cock would set him off into a passion, while all along his wife seems to have had too much insight into the philosophy of an historian whose favourite formula consisted in "calling down fire from heaven whenever he cannot readily lay his hand on the match-box." He figures as an awful example of the hero as husband, because so many lights have been turned for us upon his domestic life; but other authors, if as well provided with eloquent wives and indiscreet disciples, might have the same weakness betrayed beyond their domestic circle.

I pause here to call attention to what seems a danger to human welfare through a Platonic love of warfare too much indulged by poets and romancers, always on the look out for stirring scenes. The book-sick author sometimes develops a perverse taste for *voies de fait* of fancy. Just as women are found not unwilling to set on men to fisticuffs for them, so there is an excitable species of scribe, who proves all the more thirsty for blood and bruises that his own skin is well out of it. A generation ago I was walking with a writer at that time much concerned in pen-pricking thousands of brave men to death for his view of the fitness of things; then, as he filled a quiet English lane with words of sound and fury, a gun going off on the other side of the hedge turned him white and dumb in sudden terror. One has known other talkers whose patriotic heroism and love of slaughter were for vicarious application only; and when one finds such a man putting noisy emphasis on the manly



virtues, one need never be surprised to learn that courage, hardihood, endurance and so forth were not his own strong points.

"A sad, wise valour is the best complexion," not always noted in those most ready with hot words. Under the conditions of modern politics, the game kings once loved to play at is more in the hands of ignorant democracies, capable of being worked up, like the Athenians, by the orators of a press that fattens on popular excitement. Surely the issues of peace or war were less well trusted to one practised to set paragraphs in the field, than to a veteran who knows how a defeat is only sadder than a victory. But since the pen has gained so much power to move the sword, I would submit to the Peace Societies of Europe an infallible plan for staving off war: let each nation form a *corps d'élite* of its able editors, eloquent article writers, and newspaper proprietors, who, in gorgeous uniforms, faced with printers' ink, with a band of advertising agents to drum and trumpet them on, should have the honour of leading the van in every army, and earning immortality as a forlorn hope. "Cursed be he that delights in war!" was written by our first accredited war-correspondent on fields of battle, William Russell, who had not been moved to write thus in Printing House Square.

Books might be all the better, if their writers could be mobilized for some such active service as they now are liable to in most civilized countries. The most sane and fortunate, and not the least beloved among authors, have had the advantage of being much out in the world, far or near. Homer we can guess at as forced to take a good deal of exercise. Horace went much into society. Dante was a banished politician; Chaucer a prisoner of war, a govern-

ment official, and a knight of the shire. Camoens, both soldier and sailor, could tell his own tale of disastrous chances by flood and field. Cervantes was a bold adventurer and a hardy galley-slave before he raised so many a thoughtless laugh and a thoughtful sigh. Lope de Vega served in the Armada and Calderon in a cavalry regiment. Shakespeare is thought to have poached deer and held horses before he rose to managing theatres. Goldsmith tramped over half Europe, picking up a living as best he could. Burns was a farmer, who became an exciseman, more's the pity. Scott was a legal official all his life, and made himself keenly ready to fight for his native land in its hour of peril. Victor Hugo had his share of revolutionary vicissitudes. Tolstoi spent a youth of active service in the Caucasus and at Sebastopol. American men of letters, beginning with Benjamin Franklin, have had a good chance to gain practical experience as consuls and ambassadors, if not as colonels and frontier adventurers. In England the author, unless he be a civil servant, gets most into the open air as a journalist, reporter, amateur detective or war-correspondent. It was rare luck for the voluminous Trollope that he spent so much of his life as a Post-office Inspector, a man of letters in most favourable circumstances. And what did not Dickens owe to his early career in post chaises and stage coaches, as rapid shorthand writer, who all the time was taking notes far beyond his commission?

But those seem exceptional cases. The rank and file of authors, who are nothing but authors, have to make their livelihood under stunting conditions. In our generation rents have much gone up in Grub Street, where even successful novelists could hardly afford an attic. Its former inmates move into suburban lodg-

ings, flats in Battersea or West Kensington, jerry-built villas so far off as Woking or Rickmansworth. They are not often found in prison, now that prisons have grown grimly palatial ; but still, in the expressive German phrase, they " sit " their sentence of hard labour in cells for the most part narrow and scrimply furnished. All along their common lot has been to lead a sedentary, secluded life, breathing stuffy air and wearing out their eyes over midnight oil. Such habits breed a crop of ailments that send them, often empty-handed, to the shrines of Æsculapius, a god not ungenerous to such suppliants, who, like Thackeray and Stevenson, may offer him a dedication in grateful sacrifice. In our generation, also, they turn for help to such easy exercises as golf and tennis.

The Swiss physician Tissot, in the days of Rousseau and Voltaire, could write a volume *De la Santé des Gens de Lettres*, which has gone into many editions, and often needs bringing up to date, to be consulted at the British Museum by patients who cannot always afford to buy it, unless by luck on a second-hand bookstall. His physiology and psychology are to be sure a little old-fashioned ; but long before Herbert Spencer expounded the Law of Rhythm, Tissot had opportunities of seeing how fits of imaginative exaltation see-sawed into gloomy depression, and how either mood might get off its hinges to be confirmed as mania or melancholy. But who was the " English poet " that consulted him in a case not unique ? This anonymous author—for a doctor, of course, must not publish the patients' names—had so overstrained his mind by intense industry that, having taken Peter the Great as hero of an epic for the publication of which he had collected several thousand pounds in subscriptions, after years of work nothing was ready for the press.



Were Dr. Johnson the man to be pilgrim at Voltaire's Ferney shrine, we might have suspected him for this interesting case, whose symptoms will be familiar to most authors. "During the period of exaltation, he composed with enthusiasm, and was enchanted by his production, this passed, there came a state of feebleness, dejection and discontent, in which all these verses, admirable two days before, were pitilessly condemned to the fire." In the long malady of authorship, indeed, one of the most frequent symptoms is inability to distinguish clearly between a goose and a swan.

"Whom the gods love die young!" has been many an author's epitaph; but also his lot may be to find his days prolonged beyond expectation, beyond hope and love. Sheltered from killing blasts of fortune, out of the way of fatal accidents, not so often asked to perilous banquets, he lives on, dyspeptic, anæmic, hypochondriac and paralysed, nursing sickly humours that will not inflame into the fevers more deadly to full-blooded Philistines. So withered an apple is often seen clinging to the tree long after time has made windfalls of plumper fruit. But what profits it such a Struldbrug to be long hidden from Death, watching out of his dim eyes how the brave and the fair are untimely plucked? Old age may be cankered by ailments of mind as well as of body, and to them the man of books is more liable than another. This veteran spirit, too, bears the scars of wounds. His throbbing pulses stiffened through the strain of emotion, his once elastic heart dried to a fibre by rancours, jealousies and disappointments, his humour soured by acetous fermentation, it may be his fate to drag out an ossified and chilled life, without honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, and all that should accompany old age.

Too often, after his turn of note, perhaps of renown, he finds himself forgotten, left behind by hurrying rivals, to brood lonely over the days when he stripped for their hopeful race. Not every author can turn such a cheerful face to a mocking world as did Martin Tupper when, having gone up as a rocket hailed in two continents, he came down as a bare stick to make a cockshy for every smart criticaster. Another exceptional case seems that of his contemporary Harrison Ainsworth, who could go on bravely writing novels for a generation in which his fame had faded.

Darker fates are among the commonplaces of literary history—Heine sourly grimacing on his “mattress grave”—Edgar Allan Poe dying in a hospital—Milton a blind Samson cut off from the cheerful ways of men—Tasso raging in a madman’s cell—Dante eating out his heart with the bread of exile—Ovid shivering in savage Pontus. Looking back, we catch a long-drawn show of such tragedies, flickering dimly out with the shade of a wandering Homer, who would not be the only poet fain to beg his bread. “I have known some starved, some to go mad, one dear friend literally dying in a workhouse!” exclaims Charles Lamb. At the best, broken-down authors have often a good deal to make them crabbed or snarling in their last days, when even prosperous Tennyson turns a little sour on revisiting Locksley Hall. My old friend the late G. K. Fortescue, so well known for his kindness to readers at the British Museum, told me how one of his most painful duties would at times be to exclude from the Reading Room a man once a scholar and a gentleman, who through poverty and despair had become offensive in his habits. Too many once popular writers come to have nothing to chew but the

cud of bitter memories, when they can complain with  
"well-languaged Daniel" that

Years have done this wrong,  
To make me write too much and live too long.

We poets in our youth, it is well seen, begin in gladness—as in the childhood of the world, we all commence author by trying to be poets—but thereof in the end may come despondency, even madness, to be borne perhaps in poverty, bankrupt even of love. Very fine things can be written *De Senectute* when one has a good house in town, a villa at Tusculum, a valuable library, gossiping and letter-writing friends, and slaves to carry one's litter to some Baiæ or Bath that may prove a retreat from cold winds of fortune. "These are the things that make death terrible," the less well-provided moralist tries to console himself. But how if our philosopher have no warmer comfort than contemplation of the hour when

Earth's brown, clinging lips impress  
The long, cold kiss that waits us all!

Thus have I left to the end the fault most freely charged against authors, their impecuniousness, a fault forsooth which is not so much their own. But an apology for this failing, so manifest in the history of literature, may come better in later chapters dealing with the material conditions and prospects of an author's life.



## V

### THE AUTHOR'S APPRENTICESHIP

SOME men are born authors ; some achieve authorship ; others have authorship forced upon them. If a man nowadays win any kind of celebrity, the many-headed beast will be as eager to hear from him as to see him. Does he go to the North Pole, ascend the Mountains of the Moon, cross the Sahara in a balloon to observe there are no such mountains to be ascended, sure as fate, at the first outpost of civilization he finds a publisher's offer for his forthcoming volume. The soldier earns a pension by describing his campaigns ; the statesman more often has to leave his memoirs for posthumous publication ; the artist writes his reminiscences ; so does the author himself when hard up for another subject. They all do so, sooner or later. And such is the greed of the public for notable names that if a surgeon cuts skillfully for the stone, his views on art will be listened to ; while a popular preacher is fairly sure of a market for any novel he might like to try his hand at ; and a judge's wit comes from the bench with all the force of incongruity. The pages of our magazines gape for amateur authors whose credentials may be a success in some other field of activity. And without any grudge against those privileged intruders into the fold, one can set them aside as being but incidental

authors. Some even stumble accidentally into congenial authorship, like William Howard Russell, who while taking doubtful steps towards the Bar, medicine, school-teaching and soldiering, was pitched upon as a youth with a hard head to send among shillelaghs and report their clashing for the *Times*, whereby he found in himself an aptitude for a kind of writing destined to *faire école*. More than one of the best-read authors has come to his achievement by chance, Pepys for instance, who was for keeping his lucubrations to himself in a cipher discovered and interpreted long after it had been jotted down with some reason to blush unseen. And when a kindly subject awakes the gift of a born author, we may get such beloved books as the *Complete Angler* and the *Natural History of Selborne*.

Again there be writers who achieve authorship, as having a purpose of interest, of instruction, of usefulness to the world, of mere profit to themselves that is not to be forwarded without attempting what may be the uncongenial task of setting it forth in print. Some of the greatest names seem to stand in this category. Had Newton been a musician instead of a mathematician, his works might not have given him a place in literature. Had Adam Smith become a statesman, he might have cast his economic principles into the form of Acts of Parliament, rather than of a treatise ; or in a pulpit he might have dissipated his theory of Moral Sentiments. Famous philosophers have often been Professors, known to us best through their lectures or conversations recorded by reverent disciples, as was their way from the days of Solon and Socrates. Jeremy Bentham was disgusted with the practice of our law before he took to labouring for its reform, and but for this overmastering purpose he

might never have been the cause of so much earnest dullness in other writers. Had Darwin not had an epoch-making hypothesis to expound, was he the man to have taken to scribbling? And but for Herbert Spencer's being fired by ambition to set forth a Synthetic Philosophy, we might have had nothing from his pen unless a few contributions on railway-making, with perhaps an essay at fiction in the form of angling reminiscences, instead of the voluminous task which Taine qualifies as a great feat of scientific imagination. Not to cite contemporary instances, two of the most popular publications of a generation ago were *How to make Fowls pay*, and *How to live on Sixpence a day*, the authors of both of which notably achieved successful authorship, though its fame may have proved transitory.

But we are here to keep our eye on the born author, him who has authorship in his bone and marrow, even if it may never come out to any admirable or even visible effect. His disposition is apt to announce itself betimes; and there is no want of documents for the study of this phenomenon. Who will may hear the story of many a Sordello told by an industrious tribe of writers, not always real authors, who find their account in labouring the field of literary biography and transplanting from autobiographical gardens. Here the greenest corner seems that exhibiting the youth of authors, with abundance of illustrations, since most of us look back kindly on the age at which we first became conscious of a vision and a faculty more or less divine; and not a few have been communicative as to their first impressions in memoirs that sometimes go no further than those beginnings. Their communications may take the form of fiction rather than of fact, yet be none the less



true. Dickens as *David Copperfield*, Thackeray as *Pendennis*, Balzac as *Louis Lambert*, Carlyle as the foundling of *Entepfuhl*, are all telling us how they thought and felt in their own young days ; then by comparing such memories with formal autobiographies, we may come at some composite portrait of a child dedicated to the Muses.

The symptoms appear early, not always clearly diagnosed by empirical practitioners of education. In the nursery, the infant genius may well prove a "handful." If he do not "lisp in numbers," he has a turn for roaring when he cannot get his; way, which is like to be a way of his own. A false prognosis is easily made at this stage, since, as already laid down, most children are liable to passing attacks of poetic wilfulness ; while all fond mothers take their darlings for something out of the common. But if our future poet could now be scientifically examined, the child might be found father to the man in whims, jealousies, irritabilities, affections and strange outlooks beyond the range of normal childhood, such "intimations of immortality" as Wordsworth was conscious of trailing about him, and too generously bestowed the same upon imps for whom toys and toffee had the brightest clouds of glory. Could what educational psychologists call his "apperception masses" be now carefully studied and treated *secundum artem*, how many a Bavius or Maevius might such pundits succeed in developing into a Horace or an Ovid, and deftly transmuting Zimmermanns or Paleys into Voltaires or Coleridges ! But, as things go, the authorling is like to be left to himself, happiest if not too well tended, allowed to run a little wild, plucking his own fancies from dusty hedgerow and muddy ditch, nor depressingly subject overmuch to

crying disgrace on the score of clean pinafores and other bonds of family discipline. As like as not, those in charge of him know not what to make of one who may grow up to rhyme his characteristics for himself—

Silent when glad, affectionate though shy ;  
 And now his look was most demurely sad ;  
 And now he laughed aloud, yet none knew why.  
 The neighbours star'd and sigh'd, yet bless'd the lad :  
 Some deem'd him wondrous wise and some believ'd him mad.

When he creeps unwillingly to school, he is there pretty sure to be a marked boy. For all his love of books, we need not expect him to win prizes or scholarships ; we must not be surprised even to find him passing for a dunce like Scott, and perhaps Shakespeare. The instructors of a genius, "machines themselves and governed by a clock," are wont to see no good in this unfledged cygnet ; or if they do favour him as a *rara avis*, thereby draw on him more surely the ill-will of his schoolfellows. The hostility of a herd to its stricken deer is often shown to our queer hero, made more unsociable and timid by rough treatment. He misses his home more keenly than another mother's son ; he longs like Basil Hall for the kind word so seldom heard at school. He is teased with coarse wit, like Heine and Alfieri. He is bullied, like Cowper, almost out of his senses. He is mocked, like Goldsmith, almost out of Goldsmith's good humour. He becomes a down-trodden Ishmaelite, the butt of his fellows, driven into himself to brood over his troubles, by sullenness provoking them to the more insolent contempt. Or if he hold up his head among them, he runs it against the customs and traditions of the place. He breaks rules, and neglects tasks, without that faculty of grinning

and bearing the consequences which helps thicker-skinned young monkeys not to be too miserable, when the tear forgot as soon as shed makes a prism for the sunshine of the breast. His tears perhaps come too freely, like those of Gneschen Teufelsdröckh, who, at the Hinterschlag Gymnasium, earned for himself a soubriquet that might be translated "Waterworks" in Master John Bull's pleasantries; then such an opprobrious nickname galls his sensitive nature sorer than his tormentors can guess. He has some or other reason to look back on his old school with detestation, like Lecky and Trollope. He scorns to fag, like Leigh Hunt. He shudders to see other boys punished, like Charles Lamb. He passionately refuses to be flogged, like Châteaubriand. He rages in the cells of some barrack-like Lycée, like Maxime du Camp. He raises a revolt against the authorities, like Marmontel; or against a tyranny of upper forms, like Henry Steffens at the Roeskilde Cathedral School, Gray may be suspected of snatching the truant's fearful joy only in imagination, but innumerable poets have frequented an *école buissonnière* in the flesh that might have to suffer for it. Such a one was Alphonse Daudet, who later on would pass through a sharper ordeal as *pion*, or usher, as did Henri Conscience and many another continental story-teller. The Muse's son suffers still more painfully in the iron routine of a cadet academy, like Schiller, Bulgarin, and Kropotkin. He would give his *Ginnasio* the slip to join Garibaldi, like De Amicis. He runs away at random from school, as did De Quincey, and, more naturally, Marryat, whose schoolfellow Babbage, on the contrary, got up in the small hours to study by stealth, like the calculating boy he was. Lindley Murray, the grammarian, by the way, seems a unique instance of a boy



who ran away to school. More naturally the budding author comes to be expelled, like Landor. He falls into disabling ailments, like Gibbon. Of sturdier fibre, he may grow hardened to five different castigations a day, like Anthony Trollope, when perhaps—

Vengeance deep brooding o'er the *cane*  
 Had locked the source of softer woe,  
 And burning pride and high disdain  
 Forbade the gentler tear to flow.

The chances are that such inflictions leave weals of inward resentment, still to rankle in future years, long after his fellow-sufferers have come to wear these whips like rubies spangling their humorous memories. Thomas Ellwood, Quaker as he grew to be, almost boasts how at school he “came under the discipline of the rod twice in a forenoon, which yet brake no bones;” but the blind genius to whom he served as eyes, is taken to have kept sorer thoughts of some rough handling at Cambridge. This may explain how schoolmasters have so often fared ill at the hands of poets and novelists, as in *Roderick Random* and in *The Fool of Quality*, where an Orbilius is doomed by vengeful authors to such smarting humiliation as Camillus inflicted on the treacherous pedagogue of Falerii.

But indeed, mounting one's hobby too rashly without a firm grasp of the mane, one is apt to go sprawling over on the further side. To keep a fair balance, it must be remembered that even a clever boy may shine at school. There are two varieties of genius, the hard-roed and the soft-roed, the latter more given to cry out upon its youthful tribulations. It would not be difficult to draw up a list of poets and such like who have taken kindly

enough to school life, or, if they suffered, were silently still about it. Among leading instances, are perhaps Milton, who seems to have kept his fit of coltishness for the University; certainly Keats, who went in keenly both for fisticuffs and for the books which after leaving school he came back to borrow from his old master, Cowden Clark; and Wordsworth, who sees his schooltime in such sunny retrospect, while indeed even weaklings like Gray and Cowper can't help nourishing some affection for the play-place of their early days.

At Master Wordsworth's village grammar-school, we gather, the discipline was not over strict, nor were studies so engrossing as to vex the mind of a poet who did not appear too precociously bright and good for the company of rough youngsters, "mad at their sports as withered leaves in wind." There are even hints of naughtiness on his part, as that "sly subterfuge" in hiring an innkeeper's horses; and surely his prudent dame would not be told how he made one long bathing of a summer day, though she seemed well acquainted with his propensity for tearing his clothes; then we have a confession of making free with a boat not his own, and a hint of prickings of conscience when

a strong desire  
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird  
Which was the captive of another's toil  
Became my prey.

But if this poaching schoolboy were unlike Beattie's dedicated spirit—

Concourse and noise and toil he ever fled,  
Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray  
Of squabbling imps.

—the future laureate had also his moments of *recueille-*

*ment*, when, summoned "by an alien sound of melancholy," upon the frozen lake under twilight shades—

Not seldom from the uproar I retired,  
 Into a silent bay, or sportively  
 Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng.

Skating, boating, kite-flying, even card-playing on the long winter evenings, when we hear nothing of lessons to be prepared, were at the roots of this poet's flowering as a priest of nature; and indeed poets of his day had in general better chance to grow—

As woodland nooks  
 Send violets up and paint them blue.

It is to be feared that the contemporary genius comes in for a harder time than ever of it at school, now that it has fewer terrors for the average boy. He is not so liable to be brutally flogged or bullied, rather to be caned by "keen" captains or prefects for playing truant to the games at which his awkward hands and dreamy eyes win him no caps nor colours. But there are other rubs for a sensitive spirit, stigmatized among his companions as a "rotter," a "shirker" or a "smug." In the same blinkers and bearing-reins, to him more chafing, he is harnessed with them in teams for which exercise, of work or play, must be prescribed through every hour. Not for him nowadays to "loaf and invite his soul," to "moon about" like the embryo bards of less schooled generations, to escape with his swelling heart for lonely soliloquy such as Shelley could recall from a pregnant hour—

A fresh May morn it was,  
 When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,  
 And wept I knew not why, until there rose  
 From the near schoolroom voices that alas!



Were but one echo from a world of woes—  
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

And then I clasped my hands and looked around—  
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,  
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground—  
So, without shame, I spake :—" I will be wise,  
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies  
Such power, for I grow weary to behold  
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize  
Without reproach or check ! " I then controlled  
My tears ; my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

And from that hour did I with earnest thought  
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,  
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught  
I cared to learn, but from that secret store,  
Wrought linked armour for my soul, before  
It might walk forth to war among mankind.

Swinburne, so far as one can make out, had unexpectedly kind impressions of the rod ; but one doubts if he would have blessed " compulsory games." Wordsworth himself would find no time for a five-mile walk before breakfast,—unless in training for the school sports—when he must play up for his house at " Soccer " or " Rugger," not to speak of impositions and detentions, cankers of free hours, that under the new dispensation of discipline are specially like to fasten on a poet's wandering wits. Hardly now at " our public hives of puerile resort," can he secure his once dearest comfort of hiding himself in some quiet corner with a book, to have his troubles exorcised by enchanters known to him as to few, by the *Lady of the Lake*, by Pope's *Iliad*, which he construes so unsatisfactorily, by *Don Quixote*, in which like Heine he recognizes the *lachrymæ rerum*, while other boys see nothing in it but the coarse tricks played on Sancho Panza and the comical delusions of a chivalric

madness,—if indeed the absorbing study of “ records ” and “ averages ” leave them leisure for such out-of-date reading. He finds little time for idle studies, when all his horizon is darkened by the looming of examinations, in which the like of him has a poor chance of distinction.

Such a pariah among true-bred British bull-dogs, may be clever in his way, but it is not the schoolmaster's way ; and not every schoolmaster is sensible enough to make allowances for it, as the master of Dedham Grammar School did for young Constable, fostering his natural bent when he showed no turn for grammar ; as did not “ Louis Lambert's ” master, who burned the Essay on Will at which Balzac seemed to have wasted the hours he should have given to less ambitious themes. “ My schoolmaster,” was Carlyle's reminiscence as Diogenes, “ did little for me, except discover that he could do little.” It is your men of letters, rather, your future bishops, judges, scholars and so\*forth who are to figure in biographies as having been head-boys of their school. The destined author's lot has often been to learn little Latin and less Greek ; and as for arithmetic, mathematics and the smattering of science taught to schoolboys of this age, all that is calculated to be mere vexation to his mind. Yet perhaps, like Keats or Swinburne, he has unconsciously imbibed the spirit of Greece without being able to conjugate a verb in *mi*, or ever getting far towards any clear insight into the doctrine of the enclitic *de*. Already he may be translating the rhetoric of Cicero or the pathos of Virgil quicker than he cares to look up the words in a dictionary. In those text-books he may have vaguely caught sight of shadowy nymphs and naiads to whose grace his spectacled teachers are blind. He may thus have

picked up a good deal of knowledge not to be tested at examinations, while his blinking observations on life already go towards his apprenticeship as surely as a young puppy's paws and nose serve it in studying the properties of matter. Few books, perhaps, come amiss to this fitful scholar, so long as they come not as a task. He learns readily enough what takes his fancy, but shows slight power of dogged application. Or, if he do learn his lessons conscientiously, an awkward shyness or absent-mindedness stands in the way of his doing himself justice.

It may seem to be the genius *manqué* whom I am posing in front of my camera. We are not to forget how from the nest Macaulay was a *heluo librorum*, and John Stuart Mill an infant prodigy, like Bayle, Agrippa d'Aubigny and Pic de la Mirandola before them; nor how the admirable Crichton passed for a nonsuch in both arts and accomplishments. But if one could make a *catalogue raisonné* of names that shone forth illustriously from cloudy beginnings, we might find that imagination did not always help them over school exercises. The budding poet's case may be the kindlier one of a genius not above industry, accuracy, punctuality and all the other pedagogic virtues; yet, one takes it, he more often has to say with Chaucer's schoolboy—

“I learnē song, I know but small grammère.”

It goes almost without saying that he has long ago taken to scribbling in his spare hours, perhaps in the school magazine that gives him some chance of precociously gaining good marks in public opinion. Such a one has been known to win a big boy as protector by writing for him verses to his Valentine, or to earn alms of *kudos* by a spirited description of a



cricket match at which he himself went out for a duck's egg. And by this time he is pretty sure to have tried sending shy contributions to some more widely circulated periodical, from which, if he took care to enclose stamps and address, they come back "declined with thanks," a sore courtesy of which for years he may have hardening experience.

The ambitious youth is willing enough to take steps towards a learned profession, because the way is by a crowded yet spacious and well-turfed course on which he may frisk and canter more at his own will than in school harness. But his college career is not always such a success as was looked for. Graceless indeed must be the spirit insensible among what memories haunt our older Universities to awe it into becoming modesty.

I could not print

Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps

Of generations of illustrious men,

Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass

Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept,

Wake where they waked, range that enclosure old,

That garden of great intellects, unmoved.

At a wine-party in Milton's old rooms Wordsworth was moved, as never "before that hour, or since" into pouring out too free libations. The would-be Wordsworth or Milton may get drunk on enthusiasm, but needs no wet towel round his head to aid him in unsphering the spirit of Plato. He does a good deal of reading by fits and starts, yet hardly such as will pay in "Mods" or "Greats." He plucks at the blossom rather than the fruit of the flying term. In the vacation, he quite agrees that one impulse from a vernal wood may teach him more than all the sages can. He has wilful ways that lead him into disfavour

with the college authorities ; and it sometimes comes to a *consilium abeundi*, as in the case of Shelley and of Landor. In the end, he is like to leave the University without honours, or without a degree, as did Swinburne and Stevenson in our time, and many more in the past. Milton and Goldsmith are said to have had weals of grudge laid on their minds by actual blows at the hands of College Solomons. The brilliant Mr. Pendennis of Boniface was even plucked, to the horror of his worldly-wise uncle, till assured that it had not "been done in public." I have known a poet who afterwards won a fellowship but was plucked for his "Little Go," as not sufficiently well up in the kings of Israel. The sensitive scholar, proof against intellectual ordeals, has often had to undergo bitter indignities as sizar or servitor, entering at a gate of humility left ajar for the like of him. Looking back afterwards on these days, such a one may take a rather critical view of his *alma mater*, and in particular has no great opinion of the dons.

Here was Labour, his own bonds slave ; Hope  
That never set the pains against the prize ;  
Idleness halting with his weary clog,  
And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,  
And simple Pleasure foraging for Death ;  
Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray ;  
Feuds, factions, flatteries, enmity and guile  
Murmuring submission, and bald government,  
(The idol weak as the idolater)  
And Decency and Custom starving Truth,  
And blind Authority beating with his staff  
The child that might have led him ; Emptiness  
Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth  
Left to herself unheard of and unknown.

More often than not, perhaps, authors owe little to

school or college. What sort of schooling had Bunyan and Benjamin Franklin, Holcroft and Cobbett, Burns and Hogg? Scotland, of course,—thanks in part to her parish dominies and homespun divines,—has had a long succession of gifted sons of her hard soil, like the polyglottic Dr. John Brown, first of a learned line, who taught himself Greek on the sheep-runs of Glen Farg; and that other herd-loon Alexander Murray, whose native Galloway heath shows a monument to his achievements as an Orientalist. In imaginative literature, to be sure, one need not wonder at the success of self-educated genius. But if there be one line in which a classical education ought to “pay,” it is the study of language, and, strangely enough, some of the best-known English philologists of our time had few scholarly advantages. A late pundit, who revolutionized the study of English grammar in schools, was said to have begun life in the humblest toils, and to the end dropped his *hs* like leaves in Valambrosa, a fault that usually counts as hall-mark of educational deficiency. I once heard repeated before him the well-worn story about a certain Master of the Rolls exclaiming “’Ere comes that ’orrid ’umbug,—’umming ’is ’oly ’ymns—’ow I ’ate ’im!” but that jovial grammarian made bold to question the legend: “’E didn’t drop ’is *hs*; I’ve often ’eard ’im!” Of another living teacher of our language, it is told that at sixteen he could not read or write. A third such, his name known over Europe, informs me that he had no schooling after the age of thirteen. Two of the three Editors to whom Oxford is fain to entrust its Dictionary are, so to speak, outsiders. George Borrow seems to have learned more among tinkers, gypsies and other disreputable vagabonds than at school. This is not so surprising when an old schoolmaster of my own,



D'Arcy W. Thompson, who turned out an accomplished scholar and linguist, after all speaks ruefully of his long and elaborate education as chiefly calculated for stuffing him into a "useless University Prize Pig." In his day, he asserts, he spent twelve weary school years learning what might have been mastered in half the time, to be quickly forgotten by the majority of his schoolfellows; then at a famous *alma mater*, now no doubt more awake, one "might attend for a year the classical lectures of a College Tutor or a University Professor without one sentence falling from the lips of either that was worth picking up, except for the purpose of throwing out of window."

To tell the truth—leaving out of view the curriculum of science on which our poetic soul is less likely to enter himself—what most men best acquire at universities is mainly the not being afraid of big words, so impressive to the rest of the world. The more scholarly students learn rather careful respect for little words. They gain fellowships, lectureships, stay "up" in a somewhat enervating air, each in time by dint of picking his words and neatly arranging his thoughts, able to bring out his well-bound volume of verses or his diligently-edited text, that give him a creditable but limited reputation. This is the man of letters; the author's ambition, even when not clear about the difference between iambs and anapæsts, is to write songs and stories that will make his name a household word over half the world, so he is rather too ready to turn up his nose at that—

—trade in classic niceties,

The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase  
From languages that want the living voice  
To carry meaning to the natural heart.

Of course he has been writing all this time, to the

detriment of his reading, confined much to congenial books which he fondly imitates, playing "sedulous ape" to the poet or romancer in vogue. University magazines are started as advertisements of talents like his. From his ark he sends out doves of verse and prose, that for long show a strong homing tendency, till at length one may bring back an olive leaf from some metropolitan editor. The local press is perhaps open to him, so long as he be content to prophesy in his own country gratis, and in a strain not too loudly oracular, for at this stage genius is often found generating a gas that mixes in common air to go off with a scandalous bang. The worst thing that can happen to him may be injudicious relatives providing means for a callow flight into publication, when he little knows what future shame will cost him his pride to see himself untimely in print.

But even if prosaic elders look askance, rather, on his *cacoethes*, they cannot suppress it, as he will afterwards wish to have suppressed his first volume. Cowley offered himself as a poet before reaching his teens. Pope published a poem written in boyhood; and William Cullen Bryant was hardly fourteen when he came before the world with verses that next year got into a second edition. Tennyson and his brothers found a publisher in their schooldays. William Hone, whose future works were to be less remunerative, made a few shillings by a tiny publication at the age of twelve. Connop Thirlwall had printed his first book while still on the threshold of his teens. Even younger, Pic de la Mirandola was renowned as a precocious poet, though one is not sure if he at once got into print. Lope de Vega is said to have dictated some lines before he could write, and to have composed a play at the age of twelve: he must indeed have begun early to turn out—

all that stands in his name. The Duc de Maine was a prince, who had a better chance than most of us to bring out his "Divers works of a seven-year old author;" he became a colonel at five, and governor of a province at the ripe age of twelve. Master Francis Hawkins, under Charles I., before he was ten, translated from the French *The Youth's Behaviour*, a work that went through several editions, and let us hope the juvenile editor always behaved himself according to its excellent precepts. Master John Ruskin was only seven when he wrote verses that came to be printed. Browning took to it at the age of five, and could never remember a time when his eye was not fixed on Parnassus. At the same ripe age R. L. Stevenson dictated a History of Moses, which he could hardly spell.

In stolid British circles, indeed, too rathely budding authorship seems at the present day in danger of being nipped by the reproach of priggishness, a symptom less diagnosed by our ancestors, unless in such shrewd proverbs as "ill weeds do grow apace"—"soon ripe, soon rotten" and the like, that did not always fit the case of the above-mentioned authors. But one reads of a French boy who started a newspaper at the age of five, and at ten another which has gone on for five years under the ambitious title of *Journal des Deux Mondes*, to become a paying property that brings in 200 francs per annum as pocket money for its editor and chief contributor. And American newspapers exult over an infant phenomenon who began to read at two, to write at three, and forthwith to rhyme, to speak in public at five, at eight knew a language for every year of her scholarly life,—including Esperanto, of which she became an earnest advocate,—and by the mature age of nine had published two or three



books, giving to a gaping world such verses as—

What curious birds are common hens !  
 They make good broth and even pens,  
 They have no teeth, no hair, no nose,  
 But sport a comb red as a rose.  
 They have no arms or funny bones  
 That cause folks to let forth groans, etc., etc.

Such prodigies, like those wonderful calculating boys, may not make good their early promise. But real poetesses have sometimes blossomed early. Mrs. Barrett Browning had an epic privately printed at the age of eleven. Mrs. Norton's first production was from the pen of a thirteen-year old. At fourteen, Mrs. Hemans began with a quarto of verse, to be so harshly reviewed that she took to her bed, a touch of poetic nature that shows her own sister to the sons of Apollo. We cannot, to be sure, produce so many instances here, since, through the greater part of literary history, the daughters of Sappho were not encouraged in putting themselves forward unless as accompanists to their brothers' performances.

When we come to a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis, genius seems not so clearly precocious. Some of the best known and most beloved authors might have left large families in the flesh before rearing their famous offspring of imagination. We know what a stage of life Dante had reached when he put in his best title to immortality. We hardly know when Bunyan began to see his visions, but he seems not to have dreamed them out till shut up in a certain den. Sir Walter Raleigh was another writer who sang loudest in a cage. Izaak Walton had retired from his shop before he endeared himself as *The Complete Angler*. Cowper was quite an old gentleman when he showed what melody could soothe his madness.

Rousseau was getting on to fifty before he caught the ear of Europe. Sterne was about the same age when he burst out of his parsonage with *Tristram Shandy*. Scott's fruit set early, but he was long in coming into full bearing. Some authors, like Camoens and Cervantes, have had harsher tasks in youth to keep them from strictly meditating the thankless muse. Some, like Casanova, have done a good deal of sporting with Amaryllis in the shade before putting it on unedifying record; others also, like Benvenuto Cellini and Benjamin Franklin, are known in literature by works the nature of which throws them late in the authors' lives. Some authors, for the best part of their lives, waste themselves in dry hack-work that might easily be forgotten, had they not come to strike the oil well of a *Robinson Crusoe* or a *Vicar of Wakefield*. Some dally with a Muse in idler hours, prying or fumbling at literary exercises, till in later days they sink a shaft yielding such rich ore as the *Essays of Elia* or the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. Some, like Humboldt, Darwin and Wallace, have wandered the world to gather thoughts which they bring home to tend in some quiet nook.

It is from life that authors have to learn before they can teach to any purpose. Apprenticeship to life is at the best a life-long job; and just as most of us grow more fitted to be journeymen, we find ourselves called on to give up the business. Yet here we have all helps in learning, the tradition of elders, good counsel, wise saws, scriptures and examples always at hand, if we would but profit by them. The author's apprenticeship to his trade is less well provided for. Seldom is he reared at the knee of a fellow-craftsman, "born in a library" as Lord Beaconsfield boasted himself. There are exceptional cases: the Plinys, the Tassos,

the Corneille brothers, Fielding and his sister, the Edgeworths, the Mills, the Coleridges, the Lyttons, the Hoods, the Arnolds, the Trollopes, the Dumas, the Daudets, Macaulay and his nephews, not all of whom followed the models set by their kin. But most authors seem a "sport" in their families, and have to learn the rudiments of the craft for themselves, more often with ridicule than encouragement from those around them. There are professors and authorities, from Aristotle to modern *Loci critici*; but they hardly help the tyro with his grammar; and he is less like to make his first pot-hooks and hangers from graceful models than from bold half-text head-lines that catch an indiscriminating eye. One has heard of a school for journalists; but the only school for authors is literature, in which few make profitable progress till they have taken a degree in the university of life.

As already said, we all begin with clumsy imitation, and, following the ancestral development, most often with verse. Lucky perhaps is he whom youthful spirits prompt to the irreverent form of parody on what strikes his feelings: the blessed sense of humour implies a sense of proportion that gives promise of in time correcting natural deficiencies of judgment, when such bubbling ebullitions may have gathered head as a geyser. Less hopeful seems the case of fanciful young ladies and gentlemen who, with nothing particular to complain of, are fain to be as sad as night and to indulge a wanton turn for peering at life through sentimentally-smoked glasses. In leafy glades and blossoming bowers, youth does not shrink from dalliance with a soft-eyed muse of melancholy that comes abhorred as a wrinkled hag to sit by the cold hearth of age. Perhaps most authorlings see-saw



between the two moods, a steady balance being no property of their temperaments ; and that is well, for what are the brightest rainbows of imagination but sunlight seen through tears ?

All art is imitation ; but in other arts the beginner imitates more purposefully, with more conscious modesty, upon better chosen models and more often under skilled direction. The would-be author has rather to try his hand in secret, even in shame, himself not always clear what he would be at. His first attempt at fashioning a Mercury is as like to be a failure as Lucian's, but less like to have brought to bear on it such critical correction as indeed turned Lucian at once from the practice of an art in which failure was made so painfully obvious. What are the rhymer's means of knowing whether he have made a spoon or spoiled a horn ? The very emotions with which he daubs his sketch blind him to its effect. Bountiful nature has given him a little tip of sensibility that in his estimation outweighs untold riches of Potosi. What costs him a thrill so fresh, so strange, so entrancing, he is fain to take for a thing of value ; and the mockery that may abash him for a moment, he can soon despise as not raised by connoisseurs. If his work do fall into the hands of those who can estimate it, they are more apt to smile or shrug in silence, knowing by their own experience how its blunders are to be amended by time and practice more surely than by blame. They care not much to waste words on the callow fledgling that may incline to question a depreciating estimate, for it has already been explained how the economy of nature must endow destined authors with a good conceit of themselves. Many young authors start with no subject to write about but their own personality, one of the highest interest

to themselves but not so to other people : they are long blind as puppies to the dictum of a wise critic that "the artist-period begins precisely at the point where the pleasure of expressing self ends."

Then most students of an art that has no Academy are slow in taking to draw from the life, keeping an eye rather on the lay figures of literature. Our imitation is commonly at second-hand through some favourite author, maybe most admired as distorting the shape and heightening the tints of nature : happier and rarer the lot of innate genius or grace of environment fostering a familiarity with the noblest types. In any case, some mere exercises are needful to gain freedom of hand and sureness of eye. So much can be taught at school, easily learned by who has the faculty. But when it comes to copying style and sentiment, the young author is prone to study showy designs that catch an untrained fancy, then to exaggerate or burlesque the faults of his chosen model.

What the beginner may not want is boldness, prompting him to attempts on a scale far beyond his pigments and canvas. "I wrote", confesses Leigh Hunt, "'odes' because Collins and Gray had written them ; 'pastorals' because Pope had written them, 'blank verse' because Akenside and Thomson had written blank verse, and a 'Palace of Pleasure' because Spenser had written a 'Bower of Bliss.'" The penitent now before the reader is, also, aghast to recall his own juvenile scrawlings and their futile ambition. At the age of ten, or thereabouts, he essayed an imaginative sketch of the progress of mankind, in four copybook pages or so, which had at least the effect of astonishing a schoolmaster. Later on, I planned an epic poem on Man, with a not too clear eye on Milton. There were sentimental

verses, of course, after Byron and Tennyson : Wordsworth and Browning had not yet swum into my ken. I even experimented in unauthorized forms, one, for instance, that rang the changes upon a single rhyme, *fair, hair, rare, spare* and so on, with reference to a Dulcinea I had set up for myself with as little encouragement as Don Quixote. I sought to flirt with history in the flamboyant guise of Carlyle's *Frederick*, read stealthily at night when I should have been asleep. I vaguely recall novels begun in the style of Harrison Ainsworth, Charles Kingsley and Dumas. There were essays after the *Spectator*, and satires after Horace or Pope. Homer and Virgil, I blush to tell, moved me rather to irreverent parody. Of all these scribblings, one only was finished and preserved, to be licked into shape for print—a tale of American adventure entitled *Kidnapped*, that was eventually published for eclipse in the shadow of a greater namesake, whose author must have been once a small schoolfellow of mine, unknown to me as yet to fame. The survival of this opusculum I owed to the admiration of a brother, who had the gift of writing a fair hand, and industry to copy it all out in a form still extant. He himself had a less precocious turn for authorship, and has since printed many a page, who even in those days “dropped into” a rhyming story of our daily life, of which he may not recollect the first two lines, here saved from oblivion by fraternal gratitude:—

At twenty minutes to eight o'clock,  
The servant wakes us with a knock.

In a school boarding-house never holding more than a dozen boys, at least three of us at one time had a try at writing prose or verse on our own prompting, which goes to show the propensity no such rare one



among sons of Adam. Yet only in some does it prove overmastering ; in many it is choked by thorns or withers as soon as the sun grows hot ; in others it grows even on stony ground, and where it finds any depth of earth, such a one seems doomed to be an author.

Few of us but have to burn a good deal of what we once thought uncommon fine ; some of us are fain to bury what we still admire and think fine but nobody else thinks so. There are authors who never bear fruit good for the food of man, unless some medlar not ripe till it is rotten. One has seen gifts of sensibility and imagination running quickly to seed, to idle dreams, to gibbering folly, to fatal corruption. He whose gift is not to cumber the ground, must dig about it and dung it ; and it is there that the chance of experience sometimes serves him better than the written *Georgics* he may consult for instruction. Even when he do not know the Latin name for parsley, by trying he can find out how to protect his melons and to prune his roses, where to plant sun-flowers and where lilies of the valley, what soil suits cabbages if not laurels. He may get on faster for hints from a practised gardener ; but it is the sweat of his own brow that mostly matters. An eye on formal precepts is not amiss ; but in the world of books his mind may grow almost as unconsciously as plants suck fatness from earth and air. If only he will not be in a hurry to bring forward his productions. The best flavoured fruit, as he cannot at once understand, is that ripening slowly through trials of wind and weather, not blossoming rashly in a too genial sun to be nipped by frosts that come in the most hopeful spring.

Half by instinct, half by effort, the author has to learn his trade as best he can, the labour he delights

in physicking the pain. From other labour he is apt to shrink, and to despise as dull all lives deaf to his vocation.

Is there who ne'er those mystic transports felt  
Of solitude and melancholy born ?  
He need not woo the muse, he is her scorn.  
The sophist's rope of cobweb he shall twine,  
Mope o'er the schoolman's peevish page, or mourn  
And delve for life in Mammon's dirty mine ;  
Sneak with the scoundrel fox or grunt with glutton swine.

The poet's soul is sadly apt to be vexed when it comes to putting that soaring prancer into some kind of worldly harness. Still more vexed may be the mind of parents concerned for his future career. Such a youngster's days of pupilage have been already shown as not always promising. From the first his elders may have had cause for concern in the reports he brings from school, still more in anxious consideration to what tasks his fitful cleverness may be turned with pecuniary advantage. Professions, trades, even handicrafts are proposed to him ; in innumerable cases he has had to stoop to a clerk's desk, if not to a shoemaker's bench. The unsteady youth proves loth to settle down to any kind of industry, heedless as to chances of getting on in life, careless as to future bread and butter. He is put into an office, and we know how he pens a stanza when he should be engrossing or casting up figures. He scribbles a tale on his employer's letter paper. No service will suit him but that of the Muses, which may prove a longer apprenticeship than he reckons on. In former days he was often fain to become an usher, like the Vicar of Wakefield's son, but was soon like to be disgusted with the task of teaching what he himself had never laboured to learn. He

went up to London with vaguest hopes of finding it paved with gold, hopes which in our time have a surer foundation in the Fleet Street that eclipses Grub Street traditions. Sometimes, in hasty despair of getting his own way, he has enlisted or run off to sea, thereby putting his neck under a yoke far heavier than that of the business he scorns, yet not seldom doing better for himself than he knew, since thus he came by some rough knowledge of life, which in time might give him matter to write about. An exceptional instance seems to be John Hamilton Reynolds, who after penning stanzas not without approval, and being found worthy to collaborate with his brother-in-law Hood and his friend Keats, fell to engrossing in a lawyer's office, then lived divorced from the Muse for many years to die obscurely as a County-court official.

A whole legion of authors, from Bacon to Dickens, have had to do with the law, in its upper or lower walks, with a good chance of gathering its straw to make their bricks. The profession that ought to be most helpful in the study of human nature is that of medicine; and the young aspirant to letters might be reminded of Sir Thomas Browne, if less confidently of Sir Samuel Garth and his *Dispensary*, of Arbuthnot, Goldsmith, Smollett, Keats, O. W. Holmes, not to speak of our present poet-laureate and other living authors. As for parsons, they are all authors *ex officio*. So the parents and guardians of would-be poets have good authority for advising them to secure a firm standing point from which to try moving the world after business hours.

There is something pathetic, did we consider it rightly, in this old story of conflict between the well-meaning prudence of elders and the rash eagerness of



offspring blessed or cursed by tastes and instincts out of the common run. Crabbed age sniffs at visions of fame which, in ordinary experience, butter no parsnips; while eager youth, with the sun in its eyes, has no patience to fix them on the solid prospects pointed out at a distance. Petrarch's father threw his son's books into the fire, but rescued two of them in pity for the poet's lamentations. Tasso's father was a poet himself who, taught no doubt by his own experience, tried in vain to turn the author of *Jerusalem Delivered* into a lawyer. Boccaccio, Ariosto and many another were bootlessly bound to the same sober trade. M. Arouet, the notary, thought his son lost when he showed a taste for good society and writing verses, to be signed *Voltaire*. Diderot's father wept for joy to see his boy come home from school loaded with prizes, yet afterwards he fell out with the lad who would neither be a priest nor a lawyer. Mr. Scott W. S., as we gather from *Redgauntlet*, shook his head over the wanderings of an apprentice who after all would do well by law as by literature. We know how Sir Timothy Shelley looked askance on his son's unprofitable propensities. Heine's uncle threw away much pains in trying to win his nephew to give up all other letters for L.S.D. Pope's parents, on the contrary, seem rather to have encouraged their young hopeful in a career that led him to much gentility; but the precocious poet himself came to write: "I believe that if anyone, early in life, should contemplate the dangerous fate of authors, he would scarce be of their number on any consideration. The life of a wit is a warfare upon earth."

From a business point of view, those seniors were often in the right of it, yet I have known a heavy father, said to have offered his rhyming son £500

a year to sit down in his own business, who lived to see that son making thrice tenfold as much, not indeed as a poet but mainly as a popular playwright. There are prizes as well as blanks in this lottery so much distrusted by calculating heads. And if the would-be author here needs a word of heartening against what I shall put before him in the next chapter, let us listen to wise words offered for the consideration of another kind of genius that as often "shies from all the cut-and-dry professions and inclines insensibly toward that career of art which consists only in the tasting and recording of experience." My authority here is such an idle apprentice to law as was R. L. Stevenson, who judges that if a young ass must seek the freedom of the wilderness, there are mirages more flinty and thirsty than literature.

This, which is not so much a vocation for art as an impatience of all other honest trades, frequently exists alone, and so existing, it will pass gently away in the course of years. Emphatically, it is not to be regarded; it is not a vocation but a temptation; and when your father the other day so fiercely and (in my view) so properly discouraged your ambition, he was recalling not improbably some similar passage in his own experience. For the temptation is perhaps nearly as common as the vocation is rare. But again we have vocations which are imperfect; we have men whose minds are bound up, not so much in any Art, as in the general *ars artium* and common base of all creative work; who will now dip into painting, and now study counterpoint, and anon will be inditing a sonnet: all these with equal interest, often with genuine knowledge. And of this temper, when it stands alone, I find it difficult to speak, but I should counsel such a one to take to letters, for in literature (which drags with so wide a net) all his information may be found some day useful, and if he should go on as he has begun, and turn at last into the critic, he will have learned to use the necessary tools.

Not quite so approvable by parents, perhaps, is

his dogma that "if a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him." Literature is a trade that seems to demand only casual and agreeable labour; and the doctrine above stated will readily be received by those whose fortune is to be full of oats, or whose taste is for grazing on wild oats, the nature of the animal always being to kick and fling a little before settling down to any steady jog-trot. There are those, as Stevenson says, in whom the coltish habit may "pass gently away," under the restraint of some not too ungenial harness. Others break loose from all halters, and scamper off sniffing for a pasture of which they know not how thistly it may prove. "Scribbling is as impossible to cure as the gout," was the experience of that fellow-patient Fielding, who adds—"and as sure a sign of poverty as the gout of riches." So too few eager spirits bitten by this gadfly have the sense to do their scribbling at spare moments, like Sir Theodore Martin, who did so not without profit while attending to a more profitable business that for seventy years brought him in a handsome income. Such considerations now call for a look at what return an author can lay before commissioners of income tax.



## VI

### THE TRADE OF AUTHOR

AT first our hungry authorling is content with a taste of praise ; he is even observed to go long on a windy diet of his own satisfaction ; but sooner or later he wakes up with appetite for a peck of more solid provender, and desires what the Americans call "compensation" for the labour he delights in. And there's the rub ! He feels that his indentures to literature should be sealed with gold, not always forthcoming. Sweet is the watch-dog's honest bark, and a great many other things are mentioned by poets as most grateful under certain circumstances ; yet perhaps if they told the whole truth, nothing in their experience has come more welcome—unless the proof-sheet—than the first cheque received for their verses. I knew a highly respectable solicitor who all his life wore at his watch-chain a sovereign he had earned in youth as price of an article, fondly bearing it for a charm by which from time to time he could forget the dusty paths of his prosperous career. Again, I knew a clergyman commissioned by a certain princess to write a short letter to the London papers stating the part she had played in three coronations. For this communication one paper sent him an honorarium of eighteenpence, and it was refreshing to witness the pride and joy with which my old friend exhibited the

first money his pen had ever fairly earned in three score and ten years. So far has opinion veered since the day when a nobleman or gentleman dabbling in literature abandoned his share of the profit to the publisher, as a busy citizen may bestow on the usher the groat earned by serving on a sheriff's jury. It now appears indeed as if authorship tends to become a privilege of the aristocracy, the plutocracy and other men of means, who need leave no more profitable calling "for this idle trade." They can afford to publish books.

Here my considerations are fain to take the form of an affectionate exhortation to young authors, to whom, from the character of my own work, I have been "much exposed," like the Duke of Wellington. So many have written to me, so trustfully, so hopefully, so eagerly; some have sought my counsel in person, and I fear have gone away with a grudge against me as disposed to quench their aspirations with a dash of very lukewarm water. I have expounded to them the commonplaces of experience: that literature may make a good stick but a bad crutch; that Helicon is not Pactolus; that even true genius may find the greatest difficulty in getting discounted the bills it draws on posterity; that a volume of verses bears no close relation to a cheque-book, and so forth; but it was seldom they cared to believe me. Now, once and for all, I am going to call evidence in the case, bearing out what a certain author saw cause to write three centuries ago. "It is but a thriftless and a thankless occupation this writing of books: a man were better to sit singing in a cobbler's shop, for his pay is certain, a penny a patch." What I chiefly advise those clients of mine is to sit a while in some shop or other for punctual pay, till they are

sure their singing will bring in pennies enough by itself. Their writing should be all the better if they take time for reading, also for thinking, and none the worse if they pick up some knowledge of the world, even were it such as lies open to side-glances from a cobbler's stall.

The first question I would put delicately to untried writers is—what do they propose to write about? They will early have used up their original stock of rhyming addresses to the moon and such-like. Their stories are too much in a minor key, or strained too high on falsetto notes, to get admiring audience. As yet they have gathered little wool by moonlight, and have nothing to spin into fiction but their own threads of fragile and fluttering emotion, with which Arachne herself could hardly contrive a pleasing web. Still less likely are they to have picked up enough useful knowledge to fill their shop-window. The best of it is usually some vague idea of copying one or other popular author of the moment. In nine cases out of ten, our young author has as yet no promising pigs of his own to drive to market, while he is not sure of the way to his market, and quite unaware what a bad market this is in which demand, except for a rare line of wares, will be seldom brisker than supply. I recall one particularly confident bard, who sent me from South Africa a small volume of poems very badly printed at Kimberley, along with some opinions of the local press, the most emphatic describing his work as “a mixture of bosh and blasphemy:” this revelation of genius he desired me to have at once reprinted in London and to send him the proceeds without delay. That, of course, made a mere miniature of Sir Walter Scott's experience, when from America he had to pay five pounds postage on each



of two bulky parcels, sent by successive posts for more safety, the contents being duplicate copies of a play entitled *The Cherokee Lovers*, which the youthful author desired him to tittivate for sale to a British publisher, and to arrange for its production on the London stage, duly adorned with a prologue and epilogue from his own pen.

Most men who have tumbled or struggled into authorship would give such aspirants the same unpalatable advice, *viz.* : to be in no hurry to woo the uncertain Muse with a purpose of wedding ; to try their hands rather at some trade, profession or business wherein all the same they can be getting together and feeding up a marketable pig or two, and meanwhile may be learning how the market goes. Such sound economic doctrine one preaches from authoritative texts ; but in many cases one can say with Crabbe—who had his own sore experience in this matter to preach from—"I preach for ever, but I preach in vain."

A famous American author, whose genial and sympathetic nature brought him many communications from the " Gifted Hopkins " he has made into a type, tells us that he found himself sometimes rewarded with abuse for the delicate consideration with which he had tried to extinguish, or to trim, the literary aspirations of uninvited correspondents. It has already been explained that the young author is apt to be sanguine, impatient, rash, convinced most clearly of his own merits, while not without fond admiration for models whom he may come in time to hold cheaper. He willingly remembers how Byron woke to find himself famous ; how Schiller set all *Burschendom* afire with his youthful play of *The Robbers* ; how Fanny Burney burst into note by a

girlish novel; how soon Dickens came to his own. He forgets to note these as exceptional cases. What should be taken to heart is that Milton's most famous work was written in his last days; that Johnson learned in suffering what he taught in song, "Slow rises worth, by poverty depressed;" that Wordsworth and Browning reached their zenith hailed by a few watchers of the skies, but without coming into the paying public's ken.

To entice the eager author, indeed, he has the example of more fortunate poets, who on the whole are an early-flowering stock, but do not often command high prices. The best fruit of the novelists, as a rule, is produced at a later season. Cervantes had nearly sixty years of trials and adventures behind him when he brought out *Don Quixote*. Fielding had seen his best days before he wrote *Tom Jones*. Goldsmith had not ten years to enjoy the fame of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Thackeray became famous with *Vanity Fair* after spending half his literary life in obscurer experiments. George Eliot was nearly forty when she began to write her great novels. A popular novelist of our generation was over sixty when he struck into his vein. George Meredith came to be honoured as President of the Authors' Society, after being condemned for a great part of his life to such drudgery as reading for a publisher. I read his *Evan Harrington* in boyhood, but it was not till I had turned middle age that his neighbour Grant Allen and Henley's band of young critics blew for him the first notes of praise that swelled into a "boom." Not long before this recognition, the stock of one of his principal novels had been burned in a fire at the publisher's, who remarked to a friend of mine that it was no great loss. One could give many other

instances of a consideration offered by another deservedly popular author, Mr. Zangwill, that "literary value is unrelated to the commercial;" but let us come at once to figures and facts which, as a poet admits, are "chiels that winna ding."

The trustful youngsters who invited me to put them in the way of at once making a living by their bent for writing, usually assumed that I have reaped a rich harvest on the fields where they would glean in turn. Let me undeceive them. I thank the goodness and the grace that made me not wholly dependent on my pen, yet I have plied it as industriously as any hack-writer in Grub Street. After a good many years of diligent work, during which I had kept account of my gains, I had the curiosity to sum them up with the result that, taking one year with another, I seemed to have made an income of about one hundred guineas per annum, and this without setting down *per contra* many such incidental expenses as books, stationery, postage, office-room and general wear and tear of one's necessary equipments, not to speak of expensive journeys that supplied part of my raw material, nor the prime cost of my education in spelling, rhyming, quoting and so forth: items which, in a strictly kept ledger, would over-balance the whole amount shown as profit. May one not say that any clerk in a publisher's, who had been as long at the business, might look for a higher salary?

Even if authors were apt at keeping account books, these are naturally not as open to the public as their other works; but from casual disclosures lately made on this head, I can comfort myself by considering how I am not worse off than some more deserving competitors. I see it stated that Lafcadio Hearn, whose



work has come into so much admiration in our generation, made rather less than myself, about £100 a year. John Addington Symonds' literary income is put at the same figure; and he was at more expense for culture than most of us. Professor Church, a diligent labourer, has autobiographically set down his average receipts at £135 a year. George Gissing's *New Grub Street* is a work of fiction which this author was well able to base upon human and other documents; and his account makes but a beggarly one. James Payn, modestly reckoning himself among the first dozen or so of popular story-tellers in his time, reports that for more than thirty years he made an average income of £1,500, as to which he does not complain, but justly notes it as small compared with the gains of successful men in other professions.

The case of the poets is notorious: their virtue has in nine cases out of ten to be its own reward. Tennyson's must be taken for a phenomenal instance, who was such a keen man of business, or so well advised, that he could afford a coronet, after ruining three publishers, as the jibe went. Most bards win nothing but a crown of parsley or wild olive; if they make any money, it is not till they have sung themselves hoarse; and all their lives they may have to publish at their own expense. I think it was Aubrey de Vere who declared that he could always double his income by laying down his pen; even as a briefless barrister opined that he was sure of being £200 a year to the good by not going circuit. Are there not Crabbes and Chattertons starving among us this day on a *succès d'estime*? There are no sinecure offices going nowadays, such as that on which Wordsworth lived while the Lakeland Muse, through his most fruitful years, hardly could keep him in shoe leather.

In history and philosophy, also, one could mention famous and esteemed works that did not pay. James Spedding, Bacon's advocate and commentator, tells us that when he published a book "I have either simply given the work away, reserving nothing for myself except the privilege of being supplied with copies at the trade price, or I have paid the expenses myself and published by commission." The author of *Erewhon*, now in such good odour with booksellers, lamented to me how he had to publish most of his books at his own loss. It is well known how Herbert Spencer toiled in poverty for years at his great work, though he did not pass away before winning some modest reward for his labours. Such a leviathan of literature as Thomas Carlyle made out of it for the best part of his life less than £200 a year, so he had reason to be bitter in his warning—"Not one literary man in a hundred ever becomes popular or successful at all." Every publisher, no doubt, could tell of books that ought not to have been a loss to him, as they were.

It is the novelists who make most money, one hears; and their shining output proves a jack-o'-lantern leading many followers on to a Serbonian bog. The first notable author I ever knew in the flesh was James Grant, who startled my youthful ears by lamenting that in his latter works he was not allowed "a single damn"—had he lived to our time he might have sworn at large in print. *His Romance of War* and the like had such credit with readers in their teens, at least, that when, expounding in that recondite work *Delectus* the sentence "Isocrates sold one oration for twenty talents," a certain dominie had reduced this figure into current denomination, one of his scholars exclaimed, "Oh, sir, what must James Grant get for a book!" Another boy, professing inside knowledge,

gave out among us that our favourite romancer had contracted, for a salary of £500, to write two novels a year; but I doubt if that arrangement could hold good to the end of his life. Anthony Trollope, who had not yet swum into our ken, was then making, for the first ten years of his career, something like the price of his paper and ink, who, to be sure, lived to earn some £3,000 a year. Without beating the bush in surmises, let us take what Sir Walter Besant has to tell us, who ought to know. In *The Pen and the Book*, he calculates that there were some thirteen hundred English-writing novelists at work, of whom some dozen at the most gained large incomes, and sixty or seventy might reach four figures in their return, while rather more than twice as many made £400 a year and upwards, two hundred had to content themselves with £100 a year or so, and the rest with "little or nothing."

Since then Mr. Arnold Bennett has furnished a more cheerful estimate. He states that over a hundred novelists get £300 for every novel they write; that a certain number count their gains in thousands of pounds, and that a handful run into five figures. One popular story-teller he mentions as being recently paid at the rate of three shillings a word, or thirty shillings a line, an advance upon the sixpence a word Louis Stevenson could command at the end of his career. One shrinks from mentioning the names of those millionaires, as some of them are merely more or less facile writers who have had the luck or the cleverness to hit a vein of popular taste, not likely to be exploited in another generation, and in some cases soon worked out. At the same time, the *Author*, that ought to be an authority, is found qualifying as successful novelists those making



from £150 to £500 a year, which indeed is more than Johnson or Goldsmith made, but a poor show beside the income of a successful lawyer or doctor. Johnson, in the days when he dined for eightpence, got thirteen guineas for the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, which nowadays he might have to print at his own expense ; then, ten years later, *Rasselas* brought him in a hundred pounds, when his position was so well established that he could persuade a publisher to give sixty pounds for the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

It may be that since Besant's estimate was made, the profit of novels has been raised by literary agents, international copyright, and other machinery for crushing a larger yield of gold from imaginative ore ; but that profit seems not better distributed. There is reason to fear, indeed, that through the arts of *réclame* and the system of small profits and quick returns, the few novelists who can command a large sale are fattening at the expense of their less successful fellows. The old three-volume nuisance had at least the advantage of helping beginners to come before the public, while if novels are to be further reduced to a price based on certainty of a huge sale, the smaller fry will find getting into print harder than ever for them. As it is, many of them are fain to take service with manufacturers of fiction *en masse*, by whom each writer's talent, sliced and dried, is passed through the mill as a sort of literary copra.

Such light craft as stories, whether clipper-rigged or barge-built, have the best chance of catching what airs of fortune are astir in the literary world. The success that carries most sail is of course a popular play, by which one or two lucky authors of our time have been rumoured to count their share of profit in tens of thousand pounds. One such told me how he

had six dramas running at once on different stages, each of them dribbling so much nightly into his pocket. But the dramatists' audiences are harder to tickle and quicker to yawn than the reading public ; and, if all tales be true, it is more a labour of Hercules to get the ear of a manager than of a publisher, while the risk of putting on a play far outweighs the production of a volume. A certain familiarity with the stage, too, seems necessary for the author who would enter for this blue ribbon of his craft ; and there appear to be other considerations, such as providing good parts for the stars that sparkle in one or other theatrical firmament. So, on the whole, one can't count on earning fame or fortune by such a tragedy or comedy as the "commencing" author used to bring to town in his saddle-bags.

What are we to say of solid literature, such as in the opinion of some should monopolize this title ? The general reader might be surprised to learn how many useful and approved works have to come out at the author's expense, seldom repaid him. His best chance is to be employed by a publisher who keeps an enterprising eye open for what pattern of gossiping history, indiscreet biography, or smart writing on things in general will be in brief demand at the circulating libraries. Many a book which would not stand upright by itself will do so as part of a series, which it is the publisher's craft to plan. As a hint of how cheap literary labour is for such undertakings, I may mention what a friend of mine imparts to me, a man of university distinction and long literary practice : he wrote for a well known series two volumes requiring historical research, each of them containing nearly 60,000 words, and for each he was paid £25, which comes to exactly the proverbial penny-a-line,

less than some music-hall lions get nightly for tickling the ears of the vulgar with a single ditty. Another thriving series of volumes, twice as large, costs £40, I am creditably informed, for the literary labour of each. I have beside me a volume of some 500 double-columned small-print pages, stuffed full of dull but useful information, the collection of it looking like a good work, for which a slave of the pen was paid £35. One could easily multiply such revelations; but it is enough to say what no one behind the scenes will contradict, that most authors are glad to get anything for their work, and that most books bring their author next to no profit, unless in the experience of loss.

In Germany, it has been said, "there are too many books, too many pages in each book, too many lines in the page, too many words in the line, too many letters in the word, and too much ink in the letter." There would appear to be also too many authors dimming their eyes over this heavy type, for I learn that their earnings all round are still lower than ours. From Paris comes a story I do not vouch for, that one who had read through a book bought for a trifle on the stalls by the Seine, found at the end two pages stuck together so as to enclose notes for 3,000 francs, with a note declaring that to be all the author's pen had earned for him in half a century's work. In France, where the business of authorship seems rather better organized than with us, and where the period of copyright is longer, M. D'Avenel, in his chapters on Literary Property, asserts that of the 1,500 members of the *Société des gens de lettres*, only 100 at the most can live by their share of the 500,000 francs or so annually collected and distributed by the Society, which, however, it must be remembered, deals with only part of its clients' gains. Below authors of this



rank, the same writer shows a proletariat of literary hodmen eager to work for two sous a line. There, as here, the only paying line is fiction, printed or acted. Everywhere the same mournful truth stands confessed, that authorship, in the lump, is a poor business. So is gold mining, to be sure, for its *main d'œuvre*; but the digger works doggedly on in hopes that his next panful will turn out a nugget. In the end, as often as not, he is fain to give up picking at claims on his own account, and to hire himself to the combinations of capital that can bring expensive machinery and scientific enterprise to bear on the reef; but the hack-miner's wages, one understands, nourish no day-dreams of Alnaschar.

Knowing how the matter stands, shall one not be chary of sending a hopeful youth in search of oases in a desert that yields so little pasture? I have often tried my best to put such a one in the way of browsing: ours is a trade in which we are constantly asked to recommend competitors to our customers, and to give a leg up to rivals who presently may be showing us their heels. But only once can I recall a case in which I was able to help an outsider to a good start, and he came to the post with a rare turn of speed that needed nothing but heading him straight to the goal. I may now mention his name—*R.I.P.* The late Professor A. H. Keane, one of the best linguists of our day, was brought up at the Propaganda in Rome to be a Jesuit missionary, in sign of which vocation he once showed me the Lord's Prayer written in more than a hundred languages. Breaking with his Church, repudiation by his family, and marriage, threw him on the London literary market. My friend R. H. Quick, of educational fame, asked me if I could find some work for one who had shown his ability by letters in a

periodical with which we were connected. At the same time a publisher was looking out for some one to translate and adapt a German book on Geography. I introduced to him Keane, who tackled the task with such success that from translator he soon became editor, then in the next edition practically author of the important work known as Stanford's *Compendium of Geography*.

One of my ex-clients for advice comes back to accuse me, after years spent on the paths he has made out for himself. His report is that, what with one thing and another, by pushing with publishers, by waiting on editors, by keeping an eye open for every chance, by sending in a paragraph here and a column there, by despising no job as too petty, by taking no rejection as final, he has after all made nearly as large an income, with more toil, trouble and anxiety, than he might have expected in the occupation which I advised him not lightly to abandon.

One thing the young author must be warned to expect, that pecuniary success is not likely to come to him without industry. He looks forward to daundering about sunny banks and braes where he can at ease pick flowers of sentiment and fancy ; but in real life the poet should learn to scorn delights and live laborious days of study, experiment and strictly meditating what may be a thankless muse. Anyhow, there is little money to be made of toying with a facile muse. What the light-minded aspirant admires is the irregularity of work which often grants long holidays alternated with labour pushed on as in hot spells of hay-making and harvesting. Many authors do their work much by fits and starts ; but the ruck of them prosper only on condition of attending punctually to business. Charles Lamb, who at odd times distilled the essence

of his wit and wisdom for the press, professes that he had piled up on his office shelves "more MSS. in folio than ever Aquinas left"; yet few clerks could have been as diligent as Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, who, besides a constant flow of periodical articles, seem to have put out between them, in loving partnership, over 500 volumes. Many writers of all work in our day count their books by the dozen, by the score, by the hundred. Perhaps our most industrious contemporary was Andrew Lang, who, at his death, had filled over fifteen pages of the British Museum Library Catalogue with the titles of volumes that at least bear his name.

A book, however long it may have been in incubation, has sometimes to be hatched in haste, by dint of assiduous sitting. The history of literature could be ransacked for *tours de force* performed by members of this idle gang. Beckford's statement was that he wrote *Vathek* in French with a single spurt kept up through three days and two nights; but indeed from his own correspondence it has been shown that he must have been thinking of but one episode, and that the whole work went through much *labor limæ*. Johnson, less likely to delude himself, declared that he wrote *Rasselas* in the evenings of a single week, spurred out of his habitual procrastination by need of money for his mother's funeral. Sir Walter Scott finished *Guy Mannering* in six weeks; and we know how swiftly, in his broken old age, he plied the pen for his creditors. Dumas, making all allowance for "ghostly" assistance, must have been a most diligent scribe before type-writing days. Balzac, when in full blast, would go to bed at six and get up at midnight, to work more than a dozen hours at a stretch. I know a lady, by the way, who undertook to translate all



Balzac—"the new edition, fifty volumes long"—in three years, and only by a little fell short of accomplishing this gigantic task.

It is more astonishing to find such bouts of work sometimes done in intervals of other avocations. Henry Neele, author of *The Romance of History*, spent long days in an office, came home at eight to write till the small hours, and rose again at five for four hours over his manuscript: no wonder he went mad and cut his throat. Scott and Trollope are happier instances of officials who lengthened their working days by stealing a few hours from the night, at the right end. No small proportion of authors are still clergymen, as most of them once were; and these must often be called away from their desks. A prolific writer I knew in my early days, the Rev. Paxton Hood, claimed to have finished in a fortnight the biography of a recently deceased popular preacher, so that the book might follow hard upon the funeral. The most extraordinary feat of application I can recall is S. C. Hall's story that under pressing circumstances he read up for, wrote, printed and had illustrated a 400 page history of France in three weeks, working night and day at a sleepless heat that cost him a brain fever. Journalists and writers for periodicals might no doubt report more prodigious efforts of speed.

It may have struck the reader that all along I have not been taking an "up-to-date" view of the writer's lot. Instead of starving in Grub Street, he nowadays writes for newspapers and magazines, enlisting in a host whose banners flaunt other devices than *Excelsior*. But *non ragionam de lor*, as they have learned to quote. The journalist may be an author, and often is. But in his capacity as journalist he has to write as he is told, whereas *qua* author his work is bringing forth what he

wishes to say. The Pegasus of the ephemeral press is driven in shafts and teams, and may grow fairly fat in his stable, once he has got over the coltish stage of training. In the service of an author, whether thorough-bred or nag, he trots, canters or gallops at his own gait, unless some Erckmann-Chatrian pair, or some Besant and Rice can hit off an ambling pace, side by side, sometimes falling out again when it comes to shoving their noses in the same manger. Beaumont and Fletcher makes the most classical instance of such collaboration, as to whom legend tells that they got into trouble by disputing in a tavern which of them should "kill the king." I could disclose a curious literary partnership of our day, a popular name that covers at least two story-tellers rolled into one, with *ghosts* also, it is whispered, made useful in the business; but, like old Herodotus, I must keep silence about certain mysteries of this priestcraft.

The journalist is simply the old hack-writer put into jingling harness, and more regularly fed than in former days, at a penny a line and upwards: this figure, I am told, is also behind the times, being in fact more often three halfpence a line, a smaller remuneration seeming appropriate rather to historians and such-like; yet also one hears of journalists less well paid than the printers who set up their copy. If his pace be smart and his action taking, the newspaper hack's pay may be even counted in silver per line, but for that he must show himself docile, diligent and of good bottom. He has to be Whig or Tory as required: I have known journalists who were both by turns, and at the nod of the same employer, sometimes running vehicles in opposition to each other, or seeing good to try if his green "Atlas" might not pay better with

a fresh coat of blue paint on the "Favourite" route. Every now and then we hear of leader-writers and even wheelers kicking over such traces ; but the well-broken journalist cannot afford a skittish conscience. His point of honour is that of the mercenary free-lance, loyal to the standard under which he draws pay and provender, but always holding himself free to accept better terms from the enemy. A veteran Dugald Dalgetty of the press once confessed to me that in all his career he took shame only for one turn of duty, that obliged him to draw up a column of hypocritical religious meditations for a certain periodical. Alas ! I have known more than one manufacturer of moral pap who himself became a castaway, neglecting the advice he served out for youth under the mask of a good old uncle or such-like. Not one luminary of the religious press alone has been marked in Fleet Street as apt to be eclipsed by Bacchus. Pious old ladies and trustful young persons, fed on sectarian morality, do well not to know in the flesh some slaves of their lamp.

Authorship and journalism, it is said, tend to become fused in our time ; but for want of up-to-dateness, the present writer must shrink from dwelling on this topic. His outlook on the literary world, it may be perceived, inclines to retrospective views, whereas the "live" journalist's watchword is "actuality." Forty years ago I facetiously remarked to Oliver Wendell Holmes, "*posted up*, as you say," to which that genial and cultured host replied with a certain stiffness, "Excuse me, not as *I* say !" Since then our periodical press has been quickly posting itself in phrases and methods that come mainly from New York and Chicago rather than from Boston. Even the last decade, one is credit-



ably informed, has wrought such changes in the street of newspaper fortunes and misfortunes that the most experienced editor of Delane's or Edwin Arnold's time might find himself a Rip van Winkle among its new men and machinery, all working at highest pressure with a din which might scare those young lions of the "Daily Telegraph" that roared so imposingly for the last generation. I meddle not with matters that are too fast for me, except in so far as denying to the facile reporter with his "scoops" and his "stories" the dignity of right authorship, a craft he has gone far to demoralize by the rattles and corals with which he exerts himself to make that great baby, the public, "take notice."

Paternoster Row stands on a slight eminence which an old inscription declares to be the highest point of the City; yet in our time it has come to be overshadowed by the lower level of Fleet Street. If the book-market be not so brisk as that which has its stalls hard by, the latter is largely to blame. Newspapers are handier than books, offer more variety, cater more keenly for the popular taste, and can be sold much cheaper. The public spends so much time in reading its newspapers that it has less leisure for books; then our newspapers do not stick at poaching on the preserves of literature, supplying daily articles that take the place of political pamphlets and periodical essays, along with poems, stories, essays, scientific, didactic and humorous matter as well as the latest telegrams and tape-reports of the money-market. What chance has a grave or even a gay volume against an enterprise that thus grasps every point by mixing the *utile* with the *dulce*! The mere author, then, has some cause for looking askance on the prosperous journalist, and chuckling to hear how, if all stories

be true, this competitor sooner falls out from the exhausting pace of such a career.

Nor is this the worst of it. Our well-spiced sheets, with their daily and almost hourly editions, have so demoralized readers as to set them always gaping for some new thing. What is asked for at libraries is not the best book but the newest. The life of most books, those in the business tell us, now lasts from three to six months. In that short term, the author must take his chance of hitting or missing popularity; and in either case is like to find his work soon thrown on the scrap-heap, or laid up rotting in dock, to make room for new craft launched daily with hopeful sails spread to catch the gusts of popular applause. Neither author nor publisher can be sure on what lines to lay their keel, nor what rig to choose, so fast does one type of cruiser supersede another in fashion. One day I came upon a successful novelist in pensive mood, and on my offering the proverbial penny for his thoughts, he glumly responded, "I was wondering what would be the next *boom*!" It is rather the second-rate author who has a *flair* for the change of wind, and cunningly goes about to sail in the wake of his better who without design, may be, has struck into a spanking course, yet does not always make the most profitable voyage of it. *Sic vos non vobis* is an old story in literary annals.

There's the extract, flasked and fine,<sup>1</sup>  
 And priced and saleable at last!  
 And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine  
 To paint the future from the past—  
 Put blue into their line.

Hobbs hints blue—straight he turtle eats;  
 Nobbs prints blue—claret crowns his cup;

Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—  
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?  
What porridge had John Keats?

The best author is not like to be the sharpest-eyed man of business, to know, or care, what colour comes into vogue. Sir Walter Besant, who had more business aptitude, more common-sense and more *esprit de corps* than most men of the pen, was leader in forming an Authors' Society, which should provide his fellows with a corporate faculty of looking after their own interests. But this Trades Union can bring little power to bear upon conditions of employment: it seems even a question whether its activities have not gone towards reducing wages in some cases. The publishers have formed a Union of their own, presumably commanding funds to support a long lock-out, whereas authors are in no position to endure a strike, which would be a matter of much indifference to the public, well able to do without books much longer than it would take the book-makers to starve.

Other sweated trades have this remedy, approved by a sentimental philanthropy that has got on to the slippery slope of proposing to regulate wages while leaving prices to find their natural level. What the wisest statesmen and the most powerful kings have tried in vain to do, as often as not with a result the very reverse of their aim, is now to be accomplished by ignorant and hungry mobs, to whose votes we lightly submit questions of political economy that divide studious reasoners all over the world. A union of coal-miners, dock-labourers, railway-servants, is able to hold a pistol to the public head, demanding its money or its life, and thus they can raise their pay



at the expense of other classes of the community, less indispensable or more regardful of law and liberty. But an authors' strike would hurt the public as little as Mahommed's whipping his wife with palm leaves. It must have bread, but for circuses, at a pinch, it could do with cinematograph shows. Our printers know how to strike, but by what sort of "peaceful picketing" could writers jeer or bully one another into taking holiday, they who are always on the watch to grab at each other's jobs, and in whose craft, for one diligent apprentice, there are thousands of outsiders ready to try their hands at mastership. How few are the professionals in this game whose place could not be filled by amateurs, at short notice! How many authors, in such a case, would not tumble over each other in eagerness to play the blackleg!

Most authors, when one comes to think of it, are blacklegs, men of affairs scribbling in their evening hours, journalists who begin their day with a turn at fiction, retired officers, clergymen, ladies of fashion, millionaires, even kings and queens; all sorts and conditions of men contribute to bring down literary wages by cheapening their work to such a point that they will even pay for overstocking a poor market. Then remember how all approved authors become ghostly blacklegs, haunting the glimpses of the moon in cheaply elegant editions, which are bought in huge numbers at the present day: one is not always so sure of them being read.

The author who has still to keep body and soul together, hungrily desires to be bought, but his customers are still less liberal with bread than with stony praise. The last thing your "warm" citizen cares to buy is a book, unless when it comes down to its weight in coppers. He judges it mean not to pay for

a bottle of wine, for a stall at the theatre, for a cab, for a bouquet, when he will take any pains to borrow a book, rather than buy it. In the average British household, the sum spent on literature through the year would hardly make a physician's fee to cure the *sequelæ* of a banquet the cost of which might fill a book-shelf. Thus flourish the libraries, to which booksellers have to give check by a move of artificial prices, that puts new books beyond the reach of most pockets. There is something to be said for the system of joint-stock libraries, whence the subscriber can have a wide choice of books without the need of cumbering his rooms with a kind of furniture likely to collect only too much dust. But when a rate-paying maker of books is forced to support public libraries at which the neighbours may come by his wares without cost, it seems adding insult to injury that he should be invited to take the wind out of his own sails by a contribution of gratis copies. People who make such applications do not perhaps understand how an author may have to pay for his own books, with only a little more discount than is given to the ordinary customer ; or if he have books to give away, why, it is not in the case of a successful performance that dead-heads are welcome. The managers of one library wrote me that having spent most of their money on the building, they expected me to aid in supplying it with books. I handed this statement to a man of the world, whose exposition was that people who dealt in bricks and mortar had to be paid for them, but ink and paper came into a different class of materials.

On every hand the poor author finds himself treated as a charitable institution. Certain publications have of late years taken to publish our addresses,

with the result of directing to us not only letters of compliment or complaint, but applications for books, subscriptions, autographs, and other favours. The larger fry of literature always were liable to this ordeal, as appears in Dickens' correspondence, who indeed had a soft heart for begging letters, which he complains of as coming in "hundreds." As a sample of such applications, based on the mistaken notion that we are rich as well as generous, a lady once wrote me that she was equipping a bazaar for the conversion of the Jews: she desired me to seek out authors at a literary club I belonged to and get them to send copies of their works for sale at her stall. I replied that having gone to the club in question, I had met two or three authors, who were Jews and presumably unready to contribute to their own conversion: I added that to the best of my knowledge and belief these men could ill afford to support anything beyond their own households; and I asked the lady why she did not rather apply to publishers, whose addresses suggested a larger share of the profits of literature. Such a person has no sense of humour, and she wrote back warmly thanking me for my advice, which she would at once follow; and I hope she got something out of it. This correspondent was not a stranger; but from utter strangers, too, one gets similar begging letters. Some years ago, a certain country parson acquired notoriety among authors by circularizing us to the effect that as much admiring our works, he would be grateful for a copy inscribed by the writer's own hand to make part of his treasured collection. How large a library he gathered out of our good nature or vanity I know not; but one sly author wrote back that he for his part was making a collection of cheques, also more valued if bearing the drawer's autograph,



and he should be grateful to his correspondent for a specimen of his own work in this kind.

And the worst of all such correspondents, as by no means to be denied, are the income-tax collectors, keen to put a fancy figure on our modest gains. Matthew Arnold found himself assessed at £1,000 a year, and had to go before the Commissioners to explain that sweetness and light may not burn in an Aladdin's lamp. The like of us are much at the mercy of officials whose charge is to squeeze all they can out of taxable persons. Most of us writers have no turn or no need for account books ; our gains can often be reckoned on the fingers of one hand. At the best, they are precarious, fluctuating and hard to estimate from year to year ; then those official Shylocks take advantage of our innocence to cut as liberal a pound of flesh as may be found on a starved carcase. I hear that, when a discrimination between earned and unearned income was lately made by our philanthropic legislators, authors had difficulty in maintaining that the royalties they received on the sale of their books must be counted as earnings and not as proceeds of investment. For myself I can say that I have dealt as scrupulously with the State as with my butcher or baker : writing seldom under my own name, it would not be difficult for me to hide from the tax-collector, to whom, on going to live in a new district, I have always offered myself as a sheep to be shorn, and have been sometimes treated as if I were a truant goat. A favourite trick is to try to nail up one's return to the higher figure at which it may have stood in some exceptionally fat year, then leave to the worried author the onus of shaking off this charge. I was once so overcharged when I happened to be living abroad, without any facility for explanation or appeal. In

the same hotel I met a retired high official of the Inland Revenue Office, to whom I had been able to do some slight service, and in return asked for his advice as to resisting such an exaction. He answered, in effect, that it was a shame, that the government was trying to cheat me, but that he advised me to pay and say no more about it as the best way of saving myself a great deal of trouble. Is this the way in which honest citizens should be treated by the pettifogging agents of a great country?

In some countries honours and titles of rank are bestowed upon authors to make up for the want of more solid boons, such as France has also forthcoming in the shape of well-endowed prizes for crowned works, and of the *jetons* going with academicianship. Our State, that does not stick at swindling this class of useful citizens, now and then makes a faint effort at rewarding them. In our time a sprinkling of knight-hoods has been bestowed upon popular authors, apparently to their satisfaction, while the publisher is content with nothing less than a baronetcy, and if he should pander with signal success to the weaknesses of the million, he might even buy a peerage. When Tennyson accepted a coronet, it was felt that so much the less laureate he; but in most cases even a poet-laureate cannot live up to such social distinctions.

A more appropriate guerdon for authorship should be the pensions of the Civil List, which, to the amount of £1,200 annually ought to be largely given to those who have done the state ill-paid services, or to their necessitous families. But the distribution of these public alms has always been apt to depend on friends at court. The day has passed when half the whole annual addition could be granted to a quasi-member of the royal family; yet in our

time there have been scandalous jobs in its apportionment. Both Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, when else well provided for, were not ashamed to draw £200 a year from this exiguous fund, though one hears that Tennyson latterly made a point of giving away his share in relief of less fortunate authors. Another poet, by no means unrewarded nor laid on the shelf, pockets the largest slice of Civil List Pension along with several hundreds a year making his retiring allowance from a government office. One fourth part of what is allowed to such a writer in fashion has been grudgingly given to a dying scholar who did spade-work of useful learning that brought in no pay. So capricious is the allotment of such favours, that more than once of late years it has raised questions in Parliament; but only once can one remember a pension being withdrawn as given scandalously amiss.

Such charities as the Royal Literary Fund make a more considerate effort to relieve the distress of men who deserve well of their fellow-countrymen. The Guild of Literature, for which Dickens worked so hard, came to nought. The Authors' Society has recently started a Pension Fund of its own, which appears to be usually applied for the benefit of novelists, the only class of authors that does make any money to speak of; and in two cases it is paid to gentlemen also enjoying Civil List pensions. This looks as if the Authors' Society contained few really necessitous members. But one has known only too many authors, and of note and usefulness, who could not afford even the guinea subscription to this association.

All whips and scorns the thorough-bred author proverbially bears with more or less patience, hoping one day to be paid in fame, if only by the "tardy bust" raised to buried merit: he hardly asks for



bread, if he may have this stone in the end. But such chill reward is even less sure than his grudging money-rate of "so much per thou." Now and then he seems worthy of a monument, but what his ashes more often get is a short newspaper paragraph, that may be a little longer, if there happen to be no political crisis, no great cricket match, no sensational murder available to fill the daily papers. His works are his best memorial, not always remembered, when he himself comes to be forgotten. If he gain in lifetime something like renown, he finds it a windy diet at the best, and no more enduring than satisfying. He could earn it more quickly and surely by being hanged for a murder that appealed to popular imagination. How many authors in our own day have lighted a squib of notoriety that soon fizzled out : as examples rise to mind "Ginx's Baby" and "Dame Europa's School," read by all the last generation, unknown to the present ! Writers with more staying power are goaded on, by the need of money or by the mere itch of keeping themselves before the public, to over-writing, till the lion of his day comes down to exhibition in a side-show. More rarely has a worn-out author the singular luck, like Bulwer Lytton, to retrim himself with new beams for the approval of another generation. Mrs. Oliphant and Anthony Trollope are examples of novelists who would now stand higher in fame if they had been not so pressed to coin their talent. But writers with far less talent have often the knack of passing false coin on their contemporaries, that will not ring true in the ears of the next generation.

A book's prosperity lies in the long ears of a many-headed beast whose taste in tickling changes from generation to generation. Even the praise of its critical contemporaries cannot always preserve it

beyond their own time. How many of us can mention the author of *The Female Quixote*, who died poor and forgotten, more than half a century after Fielding, Richardson, Goldsmith and Johnson had saluted her in chorus as their peer. To the same generation Hannah More appeared an orthodox Minerva, yet who, unless out of curiosity, ever turns her pages, any more than those of Blair's once admired rhetoric? A contemporary Gray would not now find delight in lying on a sofa to read new novels by Crebillon and Marivaux. Who remembers the very names of poets whose lives seemed worth writing by Dr. Johnson? We still read *Northanger Abbey*, kept sweet by the salt of wit; but how many of us know even the titles of those once popular fictions on which this book was a lively satire? Where are the novels over which our great-grandfathers and grandmothers sat up with moist eyes? Where are Mrs. Gore's seventy volumes? Where is Sam Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*, which some critics thought fit to throw Dickens into the shade? Where are the *Romans de longue haleine* that were not too long for Madame Scudery's generation, and Mrs. Aphra Behn's? Where are the voluminous marvels of Don Quixote's library? Gone like the *neiges d'antan*, as will be the lot of some of the most profitable books for which readers struggle at our circulating libraries! Voltaire defines a classic as a work everybody praises, but no one reads: who now reads the *Henriade*? Klopstock's *Messiah* is given as a school prize; Johnson's *Rasselas* is sold in cheap editions; but——? If we have our day at all, most of us have it but for an hour, then cease to be. Thackeray sighs to think that his novels will "go to limbo, along with *Valincourt* and *Doricourt* and *Thaddeus of Warsaw*." Nay! for some books are so embalmed

by genius, humour and sympathy that time shall not thus bury them in his dusty maw. Yet the best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if popular imagination amend them.

*Habent sua fata libelli*; and authors, too, are much the creatures of fortune. In this career, chance often seems to play a dominant part, if only by bringing a square peg upon a square hole. Dr. Johnson would hardly find a public for *Rasselas* nowadays, as our "banjo-muses" and dialect-stories would have seemed below the dignity of literature in his time. Chief among the quite worldly qualities that go to give an author some measure of success—I let him take his genius for granted if he bear in mind that this is seldom an immediately lucrative endowment—after industry, perhaps before it, should come a certain docility or adaptability that sets him on writing what people want to read. And with all his readiness, a good deal depends on opportunity. I have seen many instances where the square opening gaped, and only round pegs came to hand, others where the right man for a job turned up at the right time. So many authors believe, with or without reason, that they could do this and that work, if they got the chance; perhaps as many do not know what they could do till they are asked to try. But for John Bunyan's being thrown into prison, we might never have had the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was the vogue of Richardson's *Pamela* that prompted Fielding to write *Joseph Andrews*. Scott had thrown aside *Waverley*, forgotten till the manuscript turned up when he was searching for some fishing tackle. *Pickwick* began with a commission for some light pen sketches to accompany illustrations by an artist who presently took himself out of the way by suicide. Dickens no doubt would



have found his way sooner or later ; but would George Eliot, after aspiring to reconcile the philosophy of Locke and of Kant, have certainly taken to novel writing but for the suggestion of George Lewes ? Oliver Wendell Holmes, on whose name I dwell so often, seemed to have finished his literary career, when, at the instigation of a magazine editor, he took up a fragmentary scheme dropped a quarter of a century back, to expand it into his famous Breakfast Table series. To come down to our own current periodicals, as a favourite character in their fiction appears "Sherlock Holmes," whose latest adventures were rumoured as paid for at rate of more than half-a-crown per word ; and this profitable personage seems to owe his existence to the accident of his "only begetter" having studied medicine under an old schoolfellow of mine, who impressed the future author with a talent for rapid deduction more useful to a detective than to a doctor. As has already been pointed out, a layman who attains popular note in any other line, can always fetch a price for fame while fresh by exhibiting himself on flickering cinematograph films. So Disraeli, as prime minister, got £12,000 for the absurdest of his novels ; and General Grant could coin hundreds of thousands of dollars out of a leaden volume of Memoirs.

The reader's humble servant may venture to confirm this doctrine of opportunity from his own experience. His most profitable publication, for its size, was a skit written in his teens by which he had the luck to parody a favourite humour of the day, happily applied to an event of the moment. I have lately been asked to write a book on certain lines which nearly forty years ago I laid in vain before as many publishers as now make haste to carry out the same idea since it has

been suggested to them by certain educational pundits. My largest mass of writing came on paper through the accident of carelessly relating certain incidents of travel before a friend, who happened to be an editor, and he was tickled into asking me to make an article of them, and the article happened to be read by a publisher who thus conceived of me as able if willing to do certain work he then wanted done, and I chanced to be at leisure to do it, and our agreement led on to the writing of some dozens of volumes.

Think how even great writers have had to make a public for themselves, that might be educated into buying their books perhaps not till they come to the sere and yellow leaf of genius. That was somewhat the lot of Wordsworth, Carlyle, Browning; and one can imagine writers of their stamp lost in the waves of common life, for want of certain bladders of fortune that kept these heads above water. Most readers of Waller's day probably agreed with him in gaping over *Paradise Lost* as a tedious poem by an old school-master, with no other merit than its length. It is not probable that a Milton will remain dumb and inglorious all his life, yet in the present state of the literary market, an impecunious Keats or honest Chatterton might have his poetry buried with him, while the lower walks of Parnassus are dotted with successes, and pitted with failures, that were as much due to casual circumstance and meeting or missing of occasion as to any merit or demerit of the author. To one venturer at this game falls a good hand to be played well or ill as he can; another gets bad cards and poor partners; or, whatever suit he be strong in, it may not be the one turned up as trumps for the round; and perhaps the same ill-luck follows him throughout the rubber, till Death cuts in before he has scored a trick. Even

success sometimes may prove strangely capricious, shaking her swift plumes to depart without apparent reason. I could name one author lately deceased who, after supporting himself by the production of useful volumes for the best part of his life, found the name he had earned go so inexplicably stale on public esteem that he was reduced to poverty, against which he could presently make head by publishing similar books under other names.

Since experience and observation have moved me to put forward so many considerations that cast but a murky light on authorship, it may not be amiss to introduce a brighter illumination thrown over it by one who had well known both its lights and shadows.

The drawbacks and penalties attendant on our profession are taken into full account, as we well know, by literary men, and their friends. Our poverty, hardships and disappointments are set forth with great emphasis, and often with too great truth by those who speak of us ; but there are advantages belonging to our trade which are passed over, I think, by some of those who exercise it and describe it, and for which, in striking the balance of our accounts, we are not always duly thankful. We have no patron, so to speak—we sit in ante-chambers no more, waiting the present of a few guineas from my lord, in return for a fulsome dedication. We sell our wares to the book purveyor, between whom and us there is no greater obligation than between him and his papermaker or printer. In the great towns in our country immense stores of books are provided for us, with librarians to class them, kind attendants to wait upon us, and comfortable appliances for study. We require scarce any capital wherewith to exercise our trade. What other so-called learned profession is equally fortunate ? A doctor, for example, after carefully and expensively educating himself, must invest in house and furniture, horses, carriage and men-servants, before the public patient will think of calling him in. I am told that such gentlemen have to coax and wheedle dowagers, to humour hypochondriacs, to practise a score of little subsidiary arts in order to make that of healing profitable. How many hundreds of pounds has a



barrister to sink upon his stock-in-trade before his returns are available? There are the costly charges of university education—the costly chambers in the Inn of court—the clerk and his maintenance—the inevitable travels on circuit—certain expenses all to be defrayed before the possible client makes his appearance, and the chance of fame or competency arrives. The prizes are great, to be sure, in the law, but what a prodigious sum the lottery ticket costs! If a man of letters does not win, neither does he risk so much. Let us speak of our trade as we find it, and not be too eager in calling out for public compassion.

So wrote Thackeray at the zenith of his career, not always prosperous, yet begun with private means, good introductions to literary and lay society, and other advantages sparsely shared by the ruck of authors. But Charles Lamb, who also did not live by his pen, takes a gloomier view, when perhaps in some head-achy morning hour, he sat down to advise Bernard Barton rather to throw himself “slap dash headlong on iron spikes” than to give up the service of *L.S.D.* for letters that more often spelt *I.O.U.*

Oh! you know not (may you never know!) the miseries of subsisting by authorship. 'Tis a pretty appendage to a situation like yours or mine; but a slavery, worse than all slavery, to be a bookseller's dependant, to drudge your brains for pots of ale and breasts of mutton, to change your free thoughts and involuntary numbers for ungracious task work. Those fellows hate *us*. The reason I take to be that, contrary to other trades in which the master gets the credit (a jeweller or silversmith for instance) and the journeyman who really does the fine work, is in the background,—in our work the world gives all the credit to us, whom *they* consider as their journeymen, and therefore do they hate us, and cheat us, and oppress us, and would wring the blood of us out, to put another sixpence in their mechanical pouches!

Here, then, we run up against that *bête noire* of the author, whose fortunes are so bound up with his, that the publisher earns a name, for the great part no good one, in the story of authorship.

## VII

### PUBLISHERS

As Don Quixote, his head full of fancies and fictions, sallied forth attended by a squire of shrewd mother wit and common sense, not without his own touch of human weakness, yet clear-eyed for ass-colt bills and other profits, so the author goes unequally yoked in his enterprise with an uncongenial spirit, their partnership making a proverbial antithesis like the pot and the kettle, the wolf and the lamb, powder and shot, oil and vinegar, heat and cold, to which might be strung on many other similitudes that suggest themselves from various points of view. The authors are free with such figures of speech; the publisher has his eye rather on more solid coinage. Since we learn of their relations chiefly from the pen of the author, the publisher is apt to be fitted with the more odious term of the comparison. Were publishers much in the way of publishing for themselves, they might eloquently comment upon the elder D'Israeli's account of "Authors who have ruined their book-sellers." But, as a matter of fact, this outspoken reproach is mostly on one side.

Not at once did these two interests stand out in clear rivalry, or convenient co-operation. The primeval author's publisher would be something like a rattle, a tom-tom, or a mysterious bosom-companion like

that serpent recorded as himself the first author of fiction. Something like a printer first comes to light under the earliest dawn of Babylonian history, when cuneiform characters were stamped on brick tablets that appear like to outlast by ages the clayed-paper volumes of our own popular literature. Kings, high priests or law-givers must have been the virtual publishers of ancient days; and there could have been no money in the trade when the best advertised book took the form of a pyramid or a rock sculpture. China is said to have anticipated Western civilization in the invention of bamboo tablets, silk scrolls, ink, and even types; and before the dawn of our era, it brought out so many books that a Philistine emperor had most of them burned along with their authors; but one does not hear what happened to any publishers.

In ancient Greece, the first publishers appear to have been reciters; and Herodotus has the name of thus bringing out his own works, *viva voce*, at the Olympic Games. The rhapsodists are supposed to have edited as well as published Homer. Questions of copyright would hardly arise till paper and ink brought some kind of organization for the distribution of manuscripts, such as went on at Athens, and more largely at Alexandria, where the library founded by Ptolemy Soter came to contain hundreds of thousands of books to make a bonfire for Cæsar's soldiery, and again for illiterate Saracens. Some of these were enormous scrolls, unwound for awkward reading, and soon divided into more manageable form as "volumes" or "books" of one great work. The material was the papyrus of which Egypt had a monopoly, and instead of printers the publisher employed probably sweated industry of copyists from dictation.



After the conquest of Greece and Egypt, Rome in turn became a great centre of book production. Rome of the Augustan age had booksellers, whose wares could be cheaply produced by slave labour, and exposed for sale, perhaps at the *columnæ* where Horace reports small demand for mediocre poetry. Atticus was so largely concerned in this manufacture, as well as in banking and the breeding of gladiators, that he might be called a publisher, whose correspondence with Cicero suggests the relations of Byron and John Murray; and he also acted as editor, to judge from the fear expressed by that philosophic orator of his pencil marks, *cerulas miniatulas*. Horace, as well as a liberal patron, had the firm of Sosii for publishers, and seems to complain that they pocketed an undue share of the profits of his works. Another old complaint of authors is made by Martial against the friends who expected presentation copies; and the *sic vos non vobis* of Virgil supplies the classical rebuke of plagiarism. *Semper ego auditor tantum?* begins Juvenal, in allusion to the fact that minor poets of that age took licence to read their poems in public or in private, and thus became their own publishers, for want of better. Ovid, and the ruins of Pompeii bear him out, boasts of his verses as scribbled by admirers on blank walls. But the true publisher is a handler of paper and ink in some sort. Every schoolboy knows how *Liber*, a book, with all its progeny, springs from the bark tablets used in a ruder Italian age, long before *libellus*, a little book, got a bad name. *Biblos* was the Greek name for papyrus; and the word *bibliopole*, which remains the bookseller's most honourable designation, dates from the epoch of Alexander.

In Egypt the undertaker may be claimed as a perverted publisher, when the practice of burying manu-

scripts in tombs preserved many that would have decayed in the open air. The papyrus plant has died out on the Egyptian Nile; and it was well for literature that this more perishable material gave place to parchment, a name derived from the skins used at Pergamum, itself a place once aspiring to be a literary market, but it had not Alexandria's luck of standing long in a backwater of war.

Parchment came into use at Rome, even in the classical period, before the business of copying fell into the hands of monks, who added the art of illustration to their patient labours. They seem to have been better off for time than for material, to judge by the palimpsests that have defaced lost books of Livy or odes of Sappho in favour of more edifying writings. The value of their handiwork is shown by chains which would be used to guard a Codex from unscrupulous collectors, and by the warnings to careless borrowers, barbarous mutilators or dishonest filchers, that stand in place of publisher's imprint. Scholars, an esurient race, have not always studied the distinction between *meum* and *tuum*; and even now, in our libraries, there are treasured folios which one may hardly turn over unwatched. *Sit utendi gratia, largitori venia, fraudanti anathema* is the kind of motto prefixed to mediæval MSS. The leisurely scribes had a way of turning such inscriptions into verse or epigram, sometimes charged with the most awful threats, as *Non videat Christum, qui librum subtrahit istum*, and in others, such as *Qui te furetur, in culum percutietur*, falling into that jocular vein still in favour for schoolboy rhymes of commination against book-stealers. Some of these legends are almost identical in French, English, German and Italian, having been handed down

through international seminaries of the Renaissance to grammatical tyros of our own day, who, all unaware what crabbed headlines they copy, are wont to adorn their school books with protective legends mostly harping on the theme of dishonesty, from the impressive simplicity of

Steal not this book for fear of shame,  
For here you see the owner's name,

to a more scholarly elaboration which I find adapted in French and Italian as well as in an English version, duly illustrated :—

*Aspice Pierrot hung on a pole,  
All for having hunc librum stole.  
Si Pierrot reddidisset  
Pierrot non hung fuisset.*

A German schoolboy's *Bücherfluch* is more impressive.

*Hic liber est mein,  
Ideo nomen scripsi darein,  
Si vis hunc librum stehlen,  
Pendeabis an der Kehlen.  
Tunc veniunt die Raben,  
Et volunt tibi oculos ausgraben.  
Tunc clamabis Ach, Ach, Ach!  
Ubique tibi recte geschah.*

The monasteries undertook mainly religious and educational works. Unless for such edifying tales as the *Gesta Romanorum*, entertaining literature long had no other publisher than the minstrels who chanted their own compositions or those of mediæval bards, as the rhapsodists did for Homer. But the minstrel was anything but a capitalist, working for his meat and drink, or some trifle of gold on occasion, when he had skilfully adapted his production to flatter permanent or temporary patrons. An exception to the



rule would seem to be Rahere, munificent founder of St. Bartholomew's, yet the account that makes him a king's jester is doubtful, and he probably came by his large fortune in the character of an ecclesiastic. By and by, poets, too, found means of coming out, more or less creditably, on paper, as we know from Chaucer's malediction on "Adam Scrivener," who did not "write true" after the author's "making"—

So oft a day I must thy work renew,  
It to correct, and eke to rub and scrape;  
And all is through thy negligence and rape.

Printing brought in a new state of things, where for some time yet the characters of printer, editor, bookseller and publisher were confounded under the general title of Stationers, still the official style of a trade that takes its name from the *stationarii* who were post-masters in classical, copyists in mediæval times, and became booksellers and lending librarians under the patronage of Universities. The Stationers' Company, founded before Caxton's time, was chartered under Philip and Mary. Caxton had to be a jack of all the trades mentioned above, to which at a pinch he added that of author. By and by, booksellers are found differentiating themselves from the manufacturers who supplied their wares. From the first their shops in London tended to be grouped about St. Paul's: "true Paul's bred" is Ben Jonson's description of a bookseller whose rather mundane dealings would be carried on at most holy addresses, Amen Corner, Ave Maria Lane and the like, in later times overshadowed by the dignity of the "Row," when even the *petites maisons* of the trade betook themselves to "Holywell Street," that before it was swept away sought to deodorize its reputation by the

style of Booksellers' Row. Little Britain also was for long a dingy mart of folios and quartos ; but Washington Irving found this commerce ebbed off to the other side of Newgate Street. Printing and book-selling had soon been regulated by authorities that undertook to meddle with supply and demand as tyrannically as any Trades Union. The Star Chamber, for instance, forbade books to be sold by Haberdashers, Ironmongers, Chandlers, and all Shopkeepers that had not served a seven years' apprenticeship to one of the allied trades, bookselling, printing or bookbinding.

Though thus protected in their proper dealings, booksellers of the seventeenth century were not above adding quack medicines to their stock ; and they took a leaf from medical books in falling out a good deal among themselves, under the rules of the Stationers' Company. For the rights of authors they had no conscience, as we see by the fate of Shakespeare's works, out of which from first to last so much money has been made. Yet the poet might have starved but for his business as an actor-manager. This was a stage of anarchy as to copyright. The first authentic record of agreement between author and publisher is believed to be that famous one, under which Milton and his widow received in all eighteen pounds for "Paradise Lost." The first notable publisher, in the modern sense, is taken to be Jacob Tonson, to whom Dryden was what Pope became to Lintot, what Byron was to Murray or Scott to Constable ; and the Kit-Cat Club suggests the Christopher North clique that had their rendezvous in Blackwood's shop.

It was now that the muses turned to a publisher as their patron, weary of waiting in noble ante-rooms, despised by untipped lackeys. What a wretched

business this was we know from the experience of Johnson and many another victim of "toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail." In *John Bunce* we learn more or less veraciously how the ill-famed Curll boasted that "his translators, in pay, lay three in a bed, at the Pewter Platter Inn, Holborn, and he and they were for ever at work deceiving the public." Another contemporary bibliopole, John Dunton,—who regrets that he ever hampered himself with a shop, when the business could as well be carried on from "a convenient warehouse, with a good acquaintance among the booksellers"—rather fancied himself as an author, which may be the reason of his ill-success as a publisher. In his queer autobiography, he speaks bitterly in general of the hack-writers he had to employ, while he has a good word for some, like Defoe; and another of his staff, Mr. Ridpath, upon whom came "by some unfortunate accident or other the fate of an author," is praised for rare qualities of humility and honesty; also for his ingenious invention of the "Polygraphy or writing engine" by which half a dozen or more copies of a manuscript may be made at once—apparently the earliest attempt at typewriting. Here is Dunton's view of Grub Street.

Printing was now the uppermost in my thoughts, and the *Hackney Authors* began to ply me with "*Specimens*" as earnestly, and with as much passion and concern as the *Watermen* do *Passengers* with *Oars* and *Scullers*. I had some acquaintance with this *Generation* in my Apprenticeship, and had never any warm affection for them, in regard I always thought their great concern lay more in *how much a Sheet*, than in any generous respect they bore to the *Commonwealth of Learning*; and, indeed, the Learning itself of these Gentlemen lies very often in as little room as their Honesty; though they will pretend to have studied you six or seven years in the Bodleian Library, to have turned over the *Fathers*, and to have read and digested the whole compass both of



Human and Ecclesiastic History—when, alas ! they have never been able to understand a single page of Saint Cyprian, and cannot tell you whether the Fathers lived before or after Christ. And as for their Honesty, it is very remarkable, they will either persuade you to go upon another man's Copy, to steal his Thought, or to abridge his Book, which should have got him bread for his life-time. When you have engaged them upon some Project or other, they will write you off three or four sheets perhaps ; take up three or four pounds upon an urgent occasion ; and you shall never hear of them more.

This is what many publishers might have to say of authors, if they were given to putting their experiences into print. What authors had to say of publishers in that period, is a commonplace of the " wits " who had nothing else for it but " writing for the booksellers." " The man of Touch, in right of Midas his great ancestor, enters his caveat against him as a man of Taste," is James Ralph's account of publisher and author in what seems the first long-drawn bitter cry of this out-at-elbows fellowship, *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade stated*. There were notable exceptions to such a cat and dog attitude. Dodsley, who came to town as a footman, was successful both as publisher and author ; and he seems to have been on better terms with his poets and literary patrons than with some of his brother bibliopoles. After him, Andrew Millar earned the good word of authors by liberality, paying Fielding a thousand pounds for *Amelia*, and speculating in Thompson's *Seasons* when other publishers saw no promise in them but of frost ; he it was who could thank God to be done with Dr. Johnson, when his dilations over the Dictionary at last reached an end ; but for his own part Ursa Major growled out Millar's praise as having raised the price of literature.

The hack-author of those days might have many

masters, since booksellers were in the way of clubbing to pool risks and profit in a work, sometimes divided into as many as sixty-four shares. Still the bookseller, at his sign of "The Bible and Crown" or "The Black Raven," had hardly developed into the full-fledged publisher, unless in exceptional cases; while at the bottom this trade declined into the "Flying Stationer," of whose catchpenny wares Jemmy Catnach came to be the Tonson or Lintot. From a welter of interlaced competition, emerged the great firms of the next period, whose dealings with authors advanced Johnson's four guineas a sheet to Southey's four or five-fold as much; and the bidding of such publishers went on raising the price of literary labour, till our generation of contributors quotes its rates not by the sheet but by the thousand words.

So much for a brief history of the trade, whose shortcomings never fail to find a *vates sacer*. "There is no living with thee, nor without thee!" has been all along the cry of a chronic wrangle between author and publisher, loudly proclaimed by one of these parties, notoriously irritable or eloquent, while the other has grown hardened to pocketing affronts among the returns of the business. "Barabbas" is the author's nickname for his publisher, who for his part perhaps mutters the word genius as if it answered to Lucifer, and for the sons of Zebulon, "they that handle the pen of the writer," finds any Scriptural reproach too good, unless the name of him who dwelt with wild asses. I knew an author that thought to be scathingly satirical in addressing a certain firm as "publishers and sinners," to which they made the practical retort of serving him with a writ. As a rule, it is the publishers who keep philosophic silence in

such disputes ; they can afford to bear those quips by which the author tempers his subjection, as when, in small beer or the like, he affects to toast Napoleon for shooting a bookseller. Whether or no publishers quaff champagne out of authors' skulls, it is notorious that they often come to live in lordly mansions which they leave to their babes, while the author is more like to lodge in Grub Street, or nowadays, in Grub Road, such as may be found in many suburbs from Camberwell or Cricklewood. He may take his share out in fame ; but the publisher must have returns capable of being assessed by Income Tax Commissioners.

As I am writing, I find in print an account of the fortunes left by five contemporary authors of note, three of them editors as well as authors, whose estates range from about £400 to £9,000, the average working out at some £4,000. In the same period, five notable book publishers were not considerate enough to die, so as to afford materials for a comparison ; but five newspaper proprietors have gone over to the majority, leaving among them nearly ninety times as much money as the group of writers in question. Heine might well chuckle from his " mattress grave " that the mansion his publisher had built for himself at Hamburg ought to be taken as his own monument.

The author now asks himself more seriously whether his should not be the lion's share of the pudding as well as of the praise. The days have long gone by when noble scribblers and gentlemanly contributors were shy about taking pay for their work. Byron, who began by some such affectation, drew from first to last twenty thousand pounds or so of John Murray's money, sometimes paid in advance. Certain authors show themselves graspingly keen for their share of the



profits, as certain publishers have been generous to sons of Bohemia, and not always on mere calculation. But taking these colleagues respectively in the mass, the author's first aim is apt to be something not reducible to L.S.D., while the publisher seldom carries on his business for fame or love of letters. The one follows rather the shadow, the other the substance of success, which latter proves the more often gained. Publishers go bankrupt at times, but seem to have a Phoenix-like property of rising from the ashes of their misfortune. When the author fails, he is like to be bankrupt in hope and all. When he succeeds in money getting, it is not always to his own satisfaction, since he may have the grace to regret having put forth more matter with less art.

It is not the publisher's fault that literary wages are kept down by the state of a market in which a blackleg is as welcome as any other candidate for employment, and in which the gain must be spread over an average of results from various ventures. But some books carry the certainty, many the chance of profit; and it is asserted that such gains have not been fairly divided in the past. The authors of this generation, no longer to be kept in good humour by advances and bonuses, like the *pour boire* given to a cabman, have incorporated themselves into a Society—its original name, the Company of Authors, rejected perhaps as too closely suggesting the Army of Martyrs—which undertakes to stand up for their rights and royalties.

The Authors' Society was at first a rock of offence to the publishers, so much so that many members feared to have their names given as resorting to this refuge; but such a Trades Union is now accepted as matter of course. The publishers have on their side organized a league of their own, as is only fair. They might take

a hint from those Chinese Guilds that bring such a pressure of discipline to bear on their members that a merchant is a proverb for honesty amid political corruption and social degeneracy. At least they are in the right of it to guard their own interests ; and it seems a hopeful sign that their interest and the author's are sometimes recognized as identical, so that the two opposing leagues have been able to take common counsel and action, as they might often do to advantage.

Thus, at least, the battle is a pitched one, no longer a guerilla warfare ; and on the whole as yet, the authors have been victorious along the line, while there seems reason to suspect that this agitation has made their early struggles somewhat harder, even as the yoke of American slavery was tightened by efforts at emancipation. The publishers need not be blamed if, finding their more liberal margin of profits scrimped, they are shyer of taking risks with an unknown writer. Then, as if a union of authors were not nuisance enough, there has of late years arisen a middleman styled the Agent, who undertakes to handle the commodity of brains with wide experience and business-like coolness, so as to get the best turn of the market for a seller who is seldom in a good position to gauge his own value. Unfortunately the Agent hardly deals but in reputations already made ; and the commencing author, who needs it most, gets little help of his services. But at least no one should grudge him what backing he can get from a Trades Union and the use of any other machinery that may stand out for a minimum rate of wage. We are, in sober sooth, the most sweated of all trades, even sempstresses, taking one with another, having hardly such a sorrowful song of the sheet to sing, when the majority of books are

published at a positive loss to somebody—less often perhaps to the publisher.

I am not going to enter on that wide question, part of a wider one as it is, the relations of Capital to Labour, with the spade or the pen. But no mock-modesty need prevent me from setting forth certain lessons I have learned from a long and pretty wide experience of authorship, which has brought me into contact, friendly or otherwise, with publishers of all sorts. Perhaps I ought to say that I know less of the up-to-date publisher, who crosses swords with the Authors' Society. My dealings have been rather with the looser arrangements of a past generation, when formal written contracts were not so common as verbal agreements, or a simple letter, on which, in case of good firms, a great deal of literary property used to change hands with remarkably little misunderstanding beyond the author's chronic and suppressed grudge of being underpaid, when his book was successful, and his cheerful readiness to overlook the chance of failure. My reminiscences go back to the time when an old-fashioned publisher, though he had moved out of the shop where Messrs. Bungay and Bacon lived, would have on his premises a snug little dining-room for entertaining authors into good humour. Something of the kind still goes on in the trade, but rather, I suppose, at clubs and restaurants, as in Georgian days at taverns and coffee-houses. The sales dinner to booksellers, one understands, is still more a thing of the past. I once heard a very well-known writer tell a story, to which his personal habits gave a special point. He had called on a famous firm of publishers in New York, and saw two of the partners with results that sent him out in high dudgeon. But before reaching the corner of the block, he was tapped on



the shoulder by a hasty stranger, catching him up to say, "You have seen the wrong men. You interviewed the literary partner, and did not hit it off with him. Then you saw the financial partner, and got on no better. It was me you should have come to first: I am the drinking partner." The end of the story was a harmonious understanding. Had it turned out otherwise, the publisher might not have been to blame, for one of my experiences was being engaged to finish a book by that author, who, having been paid partly in advance, spent the money and took no further steps in the matter.

Since those Arcadian days, I have come to deal with publishers whom I never saw in the flesh, nor need to see, on this side Jordan. The development of cheap postage has, of course, made a great difference in our business. I may mention, by the way, that in half a century I can only once remember an apparition on my threshold of the printer's devil, that old bogey of authors; and this one was smartly attired in the livery of a newspaper. Another convention seems to have disappeared, the letter of introduction which a publisher was supposed to require of new clients. I am sometimes asked by raw authors for such credentials; and they still seem under the delusion that a friendly letter should be a passport to the publisher's good will: to which my reply always is that I know of no publisher who, to oblige me or anyone else, would publish a book unless he expects it to be to his profit and credit, nor am I aware of any who is not willing to hear of such a book offered him as the sufficient introduction. The publisher's concern is to appreciate the value of what the author offers, but the character or qualities of the latter only as bearing on the commercial value of his work: the former,

for instance, is less willing to hear from an unknown aspirant to fame, than from the Archangel Gabriel, or even Beelzebub himself, if he had copy to dispose of, not too much out of the firm's line of publication. But the wary publisher is always on the look out for new authors, for he cannot carry on his game without drawing fresh cards, any one of which may turn up an ace of trumps. His concern is to know a trump or an honour when he sees it; and the rule of the game is that he may either, on consideration, take it into his hand, or more or less politely let it "pass." He must have his hands full, if Andrew Lang's estimate be correct, that at least a hundred novels are written for every one that struggles into print. A publishing firm that does not deal in novels gives me from their experience a ratio of seventy to one.

Personally or by post, I have taken a hand in a good many games of the sort, played fairly or unfairly; and the general idea precipitated in my mind is with how little wisdom the publishing world is governed. This kind of merchant does not always profess to be a complete judge of the wares he deals in. One of the first publishers I had to do with used to boast with convivial emphasis, "Bless you, I know nothing about literature—if I did, I should be ruined in a week! But I know what will sell." So he believed, yet his business came to nought in the end. Another publisher I knew, a scholar and a divine, who also achieved failure, owed his ill-fortune, it was understood, to not being able to resist the temptation to publish what seemed admirable rather than what would prove saleable. One need not repeat the wicked stories authors tell among themselves of publishers' ignorance. As a matter of fact, whatever Tonson and Lintot may have been, or Bacon

and Bungay, the publisher of to-day is as like to be a scholar and a gentleman as his needy scribes. Some publishers are notoriously brought up to the business, in which their families have flourished for generations. Others come into it late in life, from quite different training and activities ; and these also do well at it, or ill. It looks as if *nascitur non fit* applies to publisher as well as to poet. Ignorant men succeed and well-instructed men fail. The man almost sure to fail is he who is not aware of his ignorance, a character found among publishers as well as among authors. I remember one such who chose the line of an educational publisher, but did not make much of it, and no wonder, when he complained to me of the gentleman whom he had commissioned to write an English grammar, then instead of dwelling on the time-honoured inanities of Lindley Murray this fellow had filled the book with "nonsense about strong and weak verbs." The flower of all knowledge, as is more frequently remarked than taken to heart, is to know what one does not know. A slow-witted British rustic, born before such as he were driven to spell out Tit-bits, may in his modest ignorance of all but soil and seasons be a wiser man than the sharp and cock-sure Yankee, common-schooled to believe whatever he sees in print ; but "that is another story," as a celebrated author would put it.

The great bibliophiles of last century, the Murrays, the Blackwoods, the Longmans, seem to have owed their success mainly to their own discrimination ; but I take it that the shrewd publisher nowadays is slow to "fancy" his own taste or knowledge of any subject, in the way of business. A publisher in a large way of business could never depend on himself to get through all the MSS. submitted to him, even now that the



art of typewriting has made this task more a property of easiness. He has to use the services of a cryptic person known as the "reader," whose judgment multiplied into the publisher's *flair*, and divided by the state of the book market, gives as a quotient the verdict of to be or not to be awaited with such anxiety by the authorling on his trial. In the long run, taking one book with another, the reader's judgment must be judged, one presumes, by results; and the law of the survival of the fittest should keep this arm of the service efficient; yet one doubts. Else, how come those more or less well-founded legends of books afterwards famous that were Ugly Ducklings to the trade, Andersen's own *Fairy Tales*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Eothen*, *The Pleasures of Hope*, *Sartor Resartus*, *The Christian Year*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *John Inglesant*, Motley's *History of the Netherlands*, and most appropriately, *Rejected Addresses*—to quote a few instances that at once rise to mind. *Vanity Fair* is said to have run the gauntlet of the Row. Jane Austen's first novel was bought for £10 by a publisher, who, on second thoughts did not think it worth printing, and it gathered dust for years till, after her first success, the family could buy it back for a song. *The Vicar of Wakefield* lay in like limbo till Goldsmith's fame was stamped by *The Traveller*. Even Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, it appears, had to go through an ordeal of rejection at several hands.

Dropping from fame to popularity, one learns that a book which sold its million of copies in our day, was refused by firm after firm till the author had the luck to print it at his own expense, an experiment that more often justifies the publisher's judgment. "Sherlock Holmes," perhaps the most popular hero of our generation, is understood not to have found favour with the

first firms that had the chance of him. One successful novelist tells us how his first book was refused by dozens of publishers before being luckily accepted by one of the chief houses. Besant, who began his successful run in double-harness with Rice by bringing out *Ready-Money Mortiboy* on their own account, warned young authors, however, against following a so seductive example. The authors who have set up in business, did not usually make a good thing of it; but to the contrary may be noted the cases of Ruskin and William Morris, who proved able to defy merely commercial considerations. One has known, by the way, more than one author turned publisher, who in this capacity showed himself an arrant sweater.

Every author of many books must have had the experience, if he cared to go through with it, of hawking a potentially immortal work from door to door till at last it found favour, or oblivion in the fireplace. Not every author knows how the report of the reader may have been more gratifying to his vanity than he suspects, yet weighted by considerations that sank the balance to declining point. On the other hand, the reader may have to say of the matter submitted to him, that he finds it foolish, ungrammatical, ill-spelt, full of carelessness and ignorance, yet that it will none the less appeal to a large section of the public, so his fiat is *imprimatur*. It would at least be wholesome and edifying discipline for a writer, could he come to know, as he seldom does exactly, what the reader has said of his work. I have had that exceptional experience. In extreme youth I wrote what I called a book, the very remembrance of which makes me blush. Inspired by not ungenerous indignation at the imperfections of a world that seemed to me deceitful and desperately wicked, I let off my soul in a display of revolutionary

squibs, *à la Sartor Resartus*, in a falsetto voice accusing heaven as well as earth, and concluding like a very minor prophet that there was nothing for it but *dies iræ* and a clean sweep. This bombshell I had the assurance to submit to one of the very first of publishing firms, which naturally declined it, but with kindly paternal counsels suggested perhaps by the immaturity of the handwriting; and to help in opening my eyes, the reader's report was enclosed for my benefit. All I can recall of it was that in effect it pronounced my firebrand philippics "very dull, apparently written to recommend the Evangelical system of theology!" I had clearly been too dull for the reader to make out what I would be at.

This was stated to be "an unusual course;" but another famous firm more than once enclosed me the verdict of a most painstaking reader—his name, I think, Williams—who in careful terms and with courteous sympathy, balanced the shortcomings of one's work against its merits in a way that should have been profitable to a young author. Yet of one book so refused, when it came to be published elsewhere with success, this model adviser confessed that, "had we seen it in type, our decision would probably have been different." Another glimpse I got behind the scenes, this time by accident, was not so satisfactory. I had sent a story to a Religious Society, which declined it. The MS. being laid away for a time, when I came to look through it I found among the leaves a letter, addressed to no one, which I read almost through before realizing that it was not meant for my eye, and that it must have been left here by carelessness. It was in fact a report on the story, signed by a well-known divine, not now living; and I am sorry to say, he had libelled my little work, one point being that he sneered



at what he called "a pious ploughman," whose part was in fact played most orthodoxly by the parish clergyman. As this was in the days of typewriting, he had no excuse for such misrepresentation. Perhaps if all those secret judgments were brought to light, writers might prove not without reason in their suspicion that "readers" sometimes indulge in a Homeric nod or so, as well they may over much that is laid before them.

I have been a reader myself on occasion, and know how this machinery works. I can remember having sent me, then living at a distance, a most careless and cryptic MS. by a celebrated writer, as to whom the publisher—a provincial one—confided to me that he could not trust any opinion nearer at hand, so much was this author detested by the local fellowship of letters. The interpretation of his script was the hardest guinea job I ever did in my life, but I read through every word of it before condemning it, the author being indeed at that stage of a distinguished career known as trying to live on one's reputation. Such confidential dealings are not to be lightly divulged; but I will tell one story, the parties to which are dead; and as it is to the credit of a publisher who lived to a good age in high respect, I will name him as the late Mr. Stanford of Charing Cross, in whose record I could say other good things. A generation ago, Mr. Stanford made attempts towards general publishing, and engaged a shrewd business man as editor. One day, happening to call on this gentleman, I took up a French book that lay on the table. "I wish you would look through that, and tell me what you think of it," said he, who knew no language but his own. I saw very well what he would be at; but, as I was making a railway journey the same day, I thought I

might as well save myself buying a book to read in the train. So I read it through, and sent an account of it; and on this report Mr. Stanford arranged for a translation. A year or two after its publication, when the matter had passed out of my mind, I got a cheque for two guineas from my editorial friend, who, in an expansive mood, owned to me how he had meant to avail himself of my services gratis, and how Mr. Stanford, on coming to go into the accounts, had rebuked him. "You must never do such a thing again: when you ask a gentleman's opinion about a book, you will always send him a guinea, and two guineas if it is in a foreign language." On such moderate terms a publisher's memory becomes embalmed among authors.

Now I, being in a jaundiced or careless mood, might well have failed to give a true account of that volume; so from my own consciousness, as well as from the celebrated examples above mentioned, I conclude a reader's judgment to be not conclusive. I once acted on that opinion, when a publisher refused a book of mine, which I felt sure would suit his purposes. As he, too, is dead, I will confess what trick I played upon him for his own good and mine. Keeping the MS. by me for a little, I gave it a new title and sent it back for his consideration. This time he accepted and published it, and came to admit that he had made money by it, as publishers can seldom be got to admit to an author; but I fear I was not equally frank with him as to the history of that transaction. I once had the experience of an ultroneous letter from a publisher writing in warm praise of a book of mine which, as he probably forgot, his firm had refused to publish.

Whether or no the publisher be master of his business, he at least claims to be a man of business, punctual,

orderly, methodical, regular, all that the author is understood not to be. Now, whatever professional men of business may have been when apprenticed to Osbaldistone and Tresham, or to Dombey & Son, there seems reason to suspect them as somewhat degenerate now that they aspire to share their lives between the City and the West End. In my salad days I belonged to a club of authors, artists and the fine flower of Fleet Street, which society, having no ground of its own, seeded itself as a parasite in the premises of a City Club, where we had separate rooms, yet so that we saw into the ways of our landlords, as Lamb's form fellows at Christ's Hospital could compare their lot with that of Boyer's pupils. It was somewhat notorious that these City gentlemen amused themselves with cards, billiards, betting and such-like, whereas we mild Bohemians, after drinking a sober glass and smoking an honest pipe, would go home betimes to the bosom of our families. That experience went to shake one's simple faith in business men, which, however, is not quite uprooted. Like Caleb Garth, I cherish a heartfelt reverence for "that myriad-headed labour by which the social body is fed, housed and clothed." A good deal of the business done on the Exchanges of this world, seems to me, indeed, not worth doing. A respectable citizen, it appears, has certain stock which he values at  $99\frac{7}{8}$ , then he casts about for some other to whom he can pass it off at  $100\frac{1}{4}$ , and congratulate himself on having done a good stroke of business. For my part, I have no desire to study the turns of such a market. As for the financial "kings" or "barons" or "trusts," that plot and scheme to "corner" necessities of life, whereby every peasant's dinner on the other side of the world is a halfpenny dearer, let such millionaires fatten on the



accursed gain and in due time marry their daughters to dukes, but for them should be reserved a hotter circle than any in Dante's Inferno.

While lacking talent to get the better of my neighbours, I consider myself a man of business. I never neglect an engagement, fail to answer a letter, put off till to-morrow the duty that should be done to-day, nor owe any man a penny longer than he delays to let me know of it. Let the publisher stand forth who can accuse me of ever breaking a bargain with him, of scrimping him of his just due, of keeping him waiting for what I had promised by a certain date, unless in case of illness, during fifty years. I daresay all authors are not equally careful, but as a class we bear an undue reproach for irregularity. Will the public consider how many paragraphs and columns and volumes, from day to day, and from season to season, have to be filled up by the exercise of faculties not so readily commanded as muscular and mechanically mental labour, then say if the craftsmen who turn out this work to time, can be altogether the idle and heedless workers of their reputation.

Sir Walter Scott made a fatal mistake in taking himself for a shrewd man of business ; but where was the prudence of the firms that misled him ? To stick to my own experience, I have very seldom had much to do with a publishing or printing firm, without having cause to complain of carelessness or remissness in just the points which are taken to be the business man's superiority, while sometimes I have found myself as well equipped in knowledge of practical matters as were the partners who depended for such details on their employés.

There was one firm that for a time flourished greenly, till in the second generation its members took to

interests outside of their business. My acquaintance with them began by their asking me to write a book on a subject of which I am utterly ignorant, then it turned out that they had addressed me in mistake for some one else ; but in later years I did a good deal of work for this firm, whose methods struck me as an illustration of how not to do it. The partner with whom I had most to do, affected Napoleonic rapidity in his transactions, as if trusting to an inspired *coup d'œil*. I once wrote him a long letter making three proposals, to which he answered on a post-card: "(1) *No good*. (2) *Do as you like*. (3) *Make an appointment*." I made an appointment, accordingly, to talk over a book I had offered to write. After keeping me waiting for a little, the publisher bustled in with my letter and another sheet in his hand. "What will you take for this?" I mentioned a sum. "Very well; there are the calculations; go on these lines." So in a minute and a half I was bowed out with this commission in my pocket, duly impressed by such a way of knocking off business. But on going into the figures given me, I found them all wrong. More than once I wrote to the publishers on their error, without any answer. When the book began to be printed, I again pointed out how it would make a volume twice as large as was designed; but it was not till nearly half the type had been set up that I could get anyone to mind me, then it had to be reset from the beginning.

It was no wonder that this firm fell in the end. For some time before, there was a period when, as a larger creditor put it to me, "it was not easy to get *small* accounts out of them:" that is, whereas printers and papermakers had to be satisfied somehow, the poor author found their cash-box bare as Mother

Hubbard's cupboard. The principal partner was much in the way of entertaining theatrical celebrities ; and when, as a guest in the next house, I sometimes caught the din of their revels, I would fain have played the part of a skeleton at the feast. At last, to save something from the impending ruin, I accepted about half what the firm had long owed me for hard work, and thanked heaven to be rid of them. Now if an author had treated a publisher so, would he be called honest or business-like ?

Another publisher, who long somehow escaped bankruptcy, has owed me a little money for the lifetime of a generation, during which he lived in a house surrounded by green bay trees at a rental two or three times what I can afford. For certain reasons, I did not choose to press him for what is due to me. But I once said to him *un mot cruel*, after the model of the poet in Alphonse Daudet's *Jack*. Seeing the gentleman about to travel by the same train as myself, and guessing that the like of him would go first-class, I took a third-class ticket and walked slowly along the train. Sure enough he sat in state, where he graciously invited me to join him. "No," said I ; "you can travel first-class ; I pay my debts." I think he had the grace to be a little ashamed ; and the small sum he still owes me I forgive him for the satisfaction of letting off my epigram.

Remissness, let us call it, in payment is bad enough ; but there is another remissness by which publishers often are very unjust. Time is money, we are told by business men, and very truly so in the case of certain books, which depend for their success on being brought out at a certain date, sometimes with the least possible delay. No wonder then if authors are found bitterly complaining of the long time taken



in the consideration of their MSS. by publishers busy as Chaucer's Sergeant of the Law, "And yet he seemed busier than he was." One would allow such a one fair time to make up his mind ; but when it comes to keeping an author in the purgatory of suspense for long weeks, even months, the poor suitor may have a real grievance. I have had a good deal of experience in bringing out books for the season of holly and mistletoe, which means that they must begin to peep forth with the daisies and buttercups ; and not once only I have lost my chance of printing in good time through a publisher keeping them too long under his consideration, more or less careful.

I am sorry to say that the worst offenders in this way are the Religious Societies which do a large business in the Christmas trade, and have a great deal of mind to make up on what they then publish. Trading on a capital of subscriptions, sure of a large circle of readers, more than one such society has made of its godliness great gain in the book-market, going far to monopolize the supply in certain lines, and crushing certain private competitors almost out of existence. Trading in the name of religion, such bodies might be expected to deal at least as fairly and considerately with authors as firms that profess mere worldly principles. In fact, religious societies have been noted for mean and unjust dealings with the authors whom they employ to their profit. Sir Walter Besant in the pages of the "Author," tried to stir up a crusade against the most dignified of these joint-stock champions of orthodoxy, which he accused of being an oppressive employer. Had he had my experience in lower walks of authorship, he might rather have couched his chivalrous lance at other shields bearing similar devices ; for that particular society is at least managed by gentlemen ;

and I should judge its hands comparatively clean of the blood and sweat of authors.

I myself once attacked such a Society in print, which never thought fit to answer my accusation, and yet most honest publishers would have felt some need of an apology. In one of its magazines I had written a number of stories, this magazine having originally been promoted by myself and a friend of mine, who were led to hand it over freely to the Society that made it a profitable property, so at least owed us a consideration and civility we did not receive at the hands of its officials. This Society advertised a series of books, for which I thought some of my stories might be acceptable, for while the copyright remained with me, the illustrations belonged to the publishers. I made this suggestion to the gentleman advertised as Editor of the series, who let me know that the matter would be taken into consideration. Understanding a Society's consideration to be slow work, I had opened the matter so early as February ; and I impressed upon the Editor that I must have a definite answer by the middle of the year, so as not to lose my opportunity of publication for Christmas. When months had passed by without any communication from him, I wrote more than once pressing for a decision, but he did not vouchsafe me the courtesy of a reply. Having waited till the very last moment, in June I took my book to a firm of publishers with whom I arranged in as many minutes as the Society had spent months over considering it. But then arose the question whether my previous offer had not tied me by an implied contract, a point accentuated by the fact of an author's having recently come off ill from a legal dispute with a publisher in somewhat similar circumstances. I wrote to the Editor of the series, informing him of

my intention to publish the book elsewhere, and insisting on its being made clear that I was free to do so. At last I elicited a testy reply that I could do as I pleased. Then in September, my book being already printed and about to be published, I had a civil letter from another official, the General Editor, informing me that his Society was willing to take it up next year, after that seven months' consideration.

Now this delay did not damage me, being as well satisfied to bring out my book with a private publisher. But I thought right to make a protest in the interest of other craftsmen who could not afford to quarrel with any prospect of bread and butter. Had I been an unknown or inexperienced writer, I should have lost my chance of publication for a whole year, because this Society's officials could not or would not give attention to the business they undertook to manage. If all stories be true, the Society makes a handsome profit out of its publishing and bookselling enterprise. Its editors are understood to draw their salaries with considerable regularity. Why should the poor devil of a scribbler, who is the mainspring of its profit-making, be put to a loss by their superiority to the ordinary standard of fairness and promptness in business transactions? Such was the question I asked at the time, but was given to understand that whoever traded with a religious society must take its dealings as he found them, and not expect the courtesy by which ordinary publishers are more concerned to secure the good-will of authors, if only as an asset in their business.

This grievance of delay is specially felt in the case of contributors to periodicals, who have taken up some theme of "topical" interest that grows stale before they can get an answer to their proposal. Such themes,



of course, the editor or publisher would rather get treated by a trusty pen on which he can lay his hand without waiting for volunteered work. More than forty years ago, public sentiment being excited by a certain event in what are called the highest circles, I was employed to bring this topic upon railway bookstalls in the form of a parody on the best-selling novel of the day, a job having to be done so quickly that part of the copy went to the printer by telegraph. I will not here own the name of that hasty skit; but it is evident at what disadvantage its author might have been in finding a printer and publisher for himself, before the public ear had to be tickled by some fresh straw of sensation. An illustrious instance in the same kind is *Rejected Addresses*, depending for success on being written and published in a few weeks: this was refused by several publishers who seem to have needed only a few hours for its consideration; but such a manuscript nowadays might be kept locked up for weeks or months by the routine of some publishing houses.

Another wrong done to authors shows a fault in the law of literary property. I have unpleasant memories of a publisher who published a book for me on a royalty, which went on selling, at a loss to himself, as he declared, yet he was always ready to buy the copyright. For many years I refused to part with it, till one day, meeting him at dinner, he took me "gross and full of bread," and in a weak moment of convivial expansion, I agreed to sell him my book outright for a very modest price. The morning's reflection brought repentance, but I kept my verbal agreement, while he never paid me anything beyond repeated promises. I can recall how, at our last interview, he expressed surprise that I had not been paid, and made a show of

noting—with a dry pen—that a cheque was to be sent me at once. But it had not come to hand, when in a year or so my debtor went bankrupt. The result of this was that my copyright, for which I had not received one penny, became the property of his creditors. So I was legally advised ; and the Author's Society gave me no hope of getting anything out of the wreck beyond my share of the inconsiderable dividend. Yet I so pressed the official receiver, that in the end, rather to my own surprise, my claim was paid in full. This book, still on the market, had expensive plates ; and might have proved difficult to sell for the benefit of the estate if clogged by a possible dispute as to the ownership of the copyright : such is the only explanation I can give of my good luck in that matter, where, I believe, law if not justice was against me.

The law is unfair to more unfortunate authors who have to do with unfortunate publishers. A friend of mine published a book, for the printing, paper and advertising of which he paid on the nail. The publisher, acting merely as agent for its sale, became bankrupt in a manner as to which ugly stories were told ; then my friend not only had to be content with a fraction of the receipts from the sale of his book, but the unsold copies, his rightful property, were seized by the book-binder in whose custody they lay, the law giving him a lien on them for the publisher's debt to himself ; and from him they had to be ransomed by the author.

This is a not uncommon hardship, authors who may have employed a bankrupt publisher being still at the same disadvantage as once were lodgers when their goods could be taken in execution among those of the landlord. The author of *Erewhon* told me, if I remember right, how he had more than once had such an unpleasant experience. But again I have been

rarely lucky in scoring off a business-firm that sought to take advantage of me under this legal injustice. I had agreed to bring out a book with a publisher, whose stability there was reason to distrust. Before handing over the MS., I had a copy made for myself. While the book was still in the press, the firm failed. The printer informed me that he had a lien on my MS., judging like Solomon of my love for the child of my brain, and seeing his way to getting his bill paid better than out of the bankrupt estate. He seemed surprised that I took it coolly ; and after a time a representative was sent to ask what I meant to do about it. I declined to do anything, pointing out that what he had seized was worth to me only the cost of copying, and to him not one farthing till he had made terms with me for its publication. The printer saw his mistake, and came down to offering abject terms, getting very little out of this stroke of business beyond a bad name among authors. One need not have much sympathy with printers, paper-makers and the like in such a case, as it is their business to know a publisher's position, and, as often as not, they are really keeping up a lame duck of the trade, throwing good money after bad in the hope of setting him on his legs again. Sometimes, indeed, a publishing firm is only the mask of a printer. But the author, unless he consult the Authors' Society, has scant means of foreseeing a catastrophe which may involve him as he is hoping in vain to pay the rent of his garret.

The author, it may be granted, is apt not to have a good head for accounts, which is presumably a publisher's strong point. And publishers' accounts are cryptic to those better versed in book-making than in book-keeping, the clearest point in them most often being a balance brought out against the author.



Even when he has learned by experience that when a book is published at five shillings, about half that amount sticks to the hands through which it passes before reaching the buyer, and barely half-a-crown is left to pay the expense of paper and print, he may still be confronted with charges for advertisements and other exactions, for which are invoked the mysterious customs of the trade. Among these customs, as now may seem scarcely credible, was that he must take the publisher's mere word for every item of expenditure on his behalf. This is still practically done in most instances, though one of the first victories of the Authors' Society was in bringing prominent firms to recognize the author's right to inspect accounts, if he pleased, and to demand vouchers such as are matter of course in other agencies.

No wonder the author often prefers the smallest payment down, whereby the publisher, for the price of a sprat, may chance to buy a whale, but also a bad sprat. When the sprat turned out a right whale, he sometimes has thrown the author an extra handful of blubber, beyond the bargain. But now that the author, under the advice of his agents and counsellors, stands out for a larger share, the publisher may well contract his casual liberality. The day has gone when he was often the author's banker; he shows himself more shy of making advances by which he sometimes lost, yet not always in the long run. The old publisher was expected to accommodate his clients in the manner of a fashionable youth's tailor. The new publisher stands more strictly on business lines, even in questions of pence, for of late, in several cases, he has been requiring the author to provide straw for his bricks, in the form of stamps to pay the postage of returned MS. And the business has changed its

character to some extent, with new markets and methods of distribution. It was once more like the exciting uncertainty of placer-mining, but now seeks rather to strike blanket-reefs, which give a steady return for working on a large scale. Nuggets and rich pockets still turn up ; but the main yield is from the crushing of literary ore, in which the publisher's experience, capital and machinery are set against the author's labour, at a rate which has to be adjusted not without a good deal of contention.

On a hint from the mining world, the remuneration of authors has lately taken more often, in whole or in part, the form of royalties. The principle of payment by results seems a fair one if fairly calculated. But here again the publishers do not always set authors a good business example. Such agreements provide for accounts and royalties becoming due at a certain date ; but in my experience it is exceptional for them to be paid punctually. There was one firm that for years owed me a settlement in July, yet I never got a penny without dunning them, and when once my dues came so late as November, it was with a grumble against my pressing for them so soon.

Of other schemes of division, such as the once approved half-profit agreement, little need be said except that the author seldom got anything out of them ; and that they have mostly withered up under the accusing light turned on them by the Authors' Society. In my early days, a common fraud practised by certain publishers was this. The aspiring author produced a MS., usually a novel, which then was bound to come out in the two or three volume form fostered by circulating libraries. This foolish fly walked into the parlour of the publishing spider, who recognized talent, genius, etc., but——. What his *but* expanded

to was a proposal that the author should contribute a certain sum to the risk of publication. This sum covered all the risk to the publisher, who printed some three hundred and fifty copies, pretty sure that the libraries would take at least a hundred or so at a price to meet, plus the author's subsidy, the cost of paper and printing. The author's returns were to begin when three hundred copies had been sold, as seldom happened. Between one hundred and three hundred, all the gain was for the astute publisher, with an off chance of the book turning out a real success for both parties.

Of course I am not speaking of high-class firms ; but this would be a business for heaven rather than for earth, if the trade did not include men no more honest than they are forced to be. Even now that the Authors' Society has exposed and exploded so many tricks and trade customs, it has still its hands full of work in protecting the rights of authors. From a recent number of its paper, "The Author," it appears that in one month the Committee has had to deal with over thirty cases of wrong done to its clients, agreements broken, MSS. detained, payments delayed or refused, and that a majority of these are in the way of being settled in the authors' favour, if only by infinitesimal dividends in bankruptcy. By no means the whole body of authors belong to this Society, as all of them should do, especially those most able to look after their own interests, on consideration of the weaker brethren who must have so often gone to the wall before they could be thus equipped in the weapons of Co-operation.

As far back as 1736 a Society was formed for helping authors to come before the public without dependence on the Caves and Newberys of the day. This differed from the Society of our day in not being an association



of authors for self-help, but a body of noblemen and gentlemen who proposed to exercise a sort of joint-stock patronage with the best intentions, as set forth in what would be to-day styled their prospectus.

To supply the Want of a Regular and Public Acknowledgment of Learning.

To assist Authors in the Publication, and to secure them the entire Profits of their own Works.

To institute a Republic of Letters, for the promoting of Arts and Sciences, by the necessary means of profit, as well as by the Nobler Motives of Praise and Emulation.

This Society held together for a dozen years, and printed about as many books of heavy metal, among them Sir T. Roe's *State Papers* and Sir Isaac Newton's *Quadrature of Curves*, some bringing a profit and some a loss. The chief complaint of the managers was that they could not sell their publications without the intervention of booksellers, who would not be content with a commission of 15 per cent. It also appears that those philanthropic publishers brought out volumes not very likely to pay. Furthermore the subscriptions fell off, so that the Society was fain to dissolve itself in 1749, its small balance of funds being handed over to the Foundling Hospital, perhaps as undertaking another class of works that do not else find a publisher.

My favourite plan of publishing is to print at my own expense, and to sell the book through a publisher who keeps a clear 10 to 15 per cent of the returns for himself. In what other trade does a middleman despise such a commission for handling wares, without risk and with little but routine labour? Yet publishing on such terms is by no means approved in the trade, and good firms will not readily undertake it. The first time I published a book on this plan, more than a

generation ago, to be sure, I was surprised by the printer begging me to keep our transaction private, as dealing thus with an author direct might earn him a bad name among his most profitable customers. So, one understands, the British criminal or litigant must engage his counsel through the mediumship of a solicitor, a point of professional etiquette not valid in America.

It may be remembered how in Bulwer-Lytton's *Caxtons*, the author of a *History of Human Error* was nigh ruined by his sanguine brother-in-law luring him into the speculation of a GRAND ANTI-PUBLISHER CONFEDERATE AUTHOR'S SOCIETY.

Now imaginative minds have again been whispering to each other that, whereas the publisher could hardly prosper without authors, authors might conceivably co-operate to become their own publishers. Some books, not always the best, are so welcomed by the public that very simple machinery would suffice to put them on the bookstalls. Some other books, not always the worst, bring so slight returns to the author, that he may well be concerned to get them printed with as little loss as need be. These things being so, certain authors of our time have recalled how in the last generation Civil Servants put their heads and their savings together—but the following out of this consideration might make my book seem to publishers quite unfit for publication.

## VIII

### EDITORS

As that cryptic being the publisher's "Reader" is a kind of criminal turned detective, so the Editor seems also a traitor to his brotherhood, pardoned and paid to act as *exécuteur des hautes œuvres*. The French editor, indeed, is no better than a publisher. In England, too, his identity was once involved with the publisher's, but the process of evolution at work on the trade since its protoplasmic days, has developed him into a publisher's responsible minister, a secretary of literary state whose office is to select, correct, touch up, dress out, in a word, to edit the writings of live and dead authors. The Editor's function, older than his title, was originally one of importance, not without dignity. In the early days of printing, when classics were in demand, unlettered printers had to depend on a scholar's services, not only for choosing what deserved printing but to act as corrector of the press. Men so famed for learning as Erasmus and Melanchthon were editors in this sense as well as authors. And all along there have been editors, as of Dictionaries and Cyclopædias, who could not be belittled as mere handlers of other men's work.

There are, to be sure, editors and editors, some being no more than valets to a classic author, others virtual despots over a scribbling province, which they



rule with a blue pencil for sceptre. The title seems as elastic as that of captain, who may command any class of craft from a coal barge to a cruiser. Sometimes his vessel hoists the flag of an admiral, under whom the commander sits eclipsed in dignity. Sometimes, like the fighting captains of old Armadas, he depends much on an experienced sailing-master, or bustling first-lieutenant, known as the sub-editor. Again, his crew may be so small that the skipper himself has to lend a hand at all jobs, his wife perhaps taking a trick at the helm, and his son goading a dull Pegasus along the bank. I myself have made voyages with the rating of editor; but commonly it was a story of playing in one's single person the parts of

The bo'sun tight, and the midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain's gig.

I once took a veritable voyage across the Bay of Biscay, when it *faisait des siennes*. The salt has been much washed out of my blood; while well satisfied that there is more of the Viking in the average Briton, I look on the sea as a damp, draughty and disagreeable place, and applaud Dr. Johnson as taking a more sensible view of ships than of Scotsmen. But long ago I had paid my footing to the winds and waves, so on this trip I could critically observe the speedy prostration of one fellow-passenger after another. The one who surprised me by holding out through all, was a mildly venerable-looking man in a broad-brimmed hat and long black coat, that carried out the general impression of a retired tradesman occupying himself as a Sunday-school superintendent. He turned out to be the oldest master-mariner alive, Elder Brother of the Trinity House and so forth. At the height of

the tempest—sailors might have styled it half a gale or so—this veteran hoisted himself on to the bridge with the view of giving his advice and assistance to the young skipper, who at once sternly ordered him down. “And quite right, sir!” the sea-Nestor told me. “In such cases, the master can’t be left too much to himself.” We noticed how he always made a point of addressing the captain as *master*; and I have lugged in this somewhat loosely flapping reminiscence to show how titles of honour tend to come down in value like the Roman penny and the French pound, till the style of a princess fits a new world “sales lady,” whose washing, when she saves up her “compensation” for a trip as far as Rome, may be done by a *donna*.

Some modern editors have no nobler task than the washing of dirty manuscript. But the title of Editor, *par excellence*, in our day belongs to the captain of a periodical liner or iron-clad newspaper, who is truly a great man on his own quarter-deck or in his sentinelled cabin, his orders received with observance by all hands, his state envied by many who know not with what anxious caution he has to shape a course in shifting winds, and to satisfy the firm or “my lords” to whom he owes his commission. If the craft he command be his own property, all the more reason he has not to let it be cast away. But care was ever the shipmate of greatness. The first Editors on record seem the priests that controlled the Delphic oracle, under whose injudicious or corrupt management the Pythia came to lose profitable credit and authority.

Since writing in papers and magazines is the surest means of earning money, with fame thrown in for signed articles, the editor may now be considered the author’s most influential patron, having in his hands power to bind and loose, the keys of acceptance or

rejection, the dispensation of indulgences that are torn from a cheque-book. The hungry authors look up to him and are, or are not, fed. Not all authors, indeed, for the spoilt popular favourite may have to be coaxed, flattered, tickled with laurels and heavily chained with gold before he will consent to figure in the triumphal procession of inky slaves, any one of whom might well stand in the editor's chariot to whisper reminders that he is mortal and how fickle a thing is public favour. One successful editor is credited with the *bon mot* that he has only to show himself at the door of his office and whistle for authors ; yet he, too, must take trouble to catch decoy-ducks of more gorgeous plumage.

Even this great man, as has been hinted, must bow before his proprietor, unless he double the parts of a Belisarius and a Justinian. There are, it is understood, some editors who by force of character or success, come to be Mayors of the Palace under a *roi fainéant*. There are also proprietors with the name of being terrible Turks, whose pashas stand in monthly dread of a bowstring known as the circulation-list. Certain literary enterprises have been noted for a rapid consumption of editors. One newspaper owner of quasi-Oriental antecedents, was notorious for falling out with his staff. The story goes that on his being asked if he still kept acquaintance with So-and-so, a journalist who meanwhile had grown to be a Cabinet minister and almost a standard author, this potentate professed not to be sure of the gentleman's identity. "The fact is, I have employed so many of those young men, that I can't remember one from another !" There was another renowned proprietor who had the name of meddling much with his editors, through "fancying himself" as an author. One of the legends about him is that being struck by the "Christy



Minstrels" performances, in their heyday of novelty, he wrote an article on them for a Cyclopædia then being prepared by his firm. The editors, judging this contribution below the dignity of such a publication, contrived to mislay it. The publisher kept it back to be presented later when the work came to *Minstrels*. Again it somehow was kept out ; but finally appeared under the head of *Negro Minstrels*, since the persistent proprietor could hardly be suppressed a third time. These editors rather deserve our gratitude ; while nothing short of execration seems the meed of that unknown potentate who forced Thackeray to leave half-told the story of *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*.

The awfulness of editorship, then, depends on the point of view. There may be intelligences to whom the editor of the Encyclopædia Britannica seems no bigger than a blackbeetle. But the young author, dropping his first contribution into the editorial letter-box, imagines himself addressing a power little short of earthly providence. And some authors no longer young delude themselves that all might still go well with them if only they had an editor by the ear. In *An Editor's Tales* is well put the matter as known to Anthony Trollope from both sides. One of the most amusing stories in that instructive book is of the aspirant to fame who spent his last three-and-sixpence for the privilege of imposing his acquaintance upon an editor in the nakedness of a Turkish Bath. This editor's tales harp upon the trials of a kindly man tempted to play the philanthropist when his duty is to carry on a business ruled by the laws of demand and supply. The fate of Trollope's chief editorship seems to show that in his case the supply was not adapted to the demand. But Thackeray retired from

the "Cornhill" in the flush of success, finding the thorns in his editorial cushion unbearable, for he was not more sensitive to criticism than to the appeals of would-be contributors who took a magazine to be an institution for the relief of widows and orphans. A good writer, indeed, is not often the stuff of which to make a good editor. There have been exceptions, yet the best in this kind may be those who do not write themselves, like Buloz of the famous French Review, and that volcanic editor of Mrs. Lynn Linton's early experience, who made the reputation of a periodical in which his chief part seems by her account to have been swearing at such of the writers as would stand his manners. "Editors are not born, but made," is the dictum of S. C. Hall, after long experience; and he declares that Thomas Campbell, Theodore Hook, Tom Hood and Bulwer Lytton, under whom he served as lieutenant, all made very bad captains of the *New Monthly Magazine*.

"It all goes by favour, and the people who write are your uncles and aunts, and grandmothers, and lady-lovers," wrote a fair and sore rejected contributor to one of Trollope's editors. This is a view often taken by the unsuccessful; but very little judgment is needed to consider how ill a periodical would flourish whose editor thought of obliging his friends rather than pleasing his readers, or to learn how Paternoster Row is haunted by the ghosts of mighty magazines, dead because their conductors failed to be on the look out for new blood. Whether from his lady-love or his worst enemy, the prudent editor should be always open to an infusion that may quicken his circulation. Yet there is some truth in the charge of "influence." Poor L. E. L. might not so soon have won an introduction to popularity had

not Jerdan of the Literary Gazette been her father's friendly neighbour ; while not to avail herself of such an advantage, Adelaide Procter was so scrupulous as to win Dickens' favour for her first contributions under the mask of " Mary Berwick." Mrs. S. C. Hall, who came to write over two hundred volumes, seems not to have thought of writing till she married a much-editing husband. More than one scribbling celebrity of our generation might be named, who would hardly have got the chance to fill so many pages, had he or she not been born in the porphyry chambers of Pendom, or by chance brought into familiar contact with its ministers.

Other things being equal, the Editor gives out a job to a friend rather than to a stranger, and employs contributors on whom he can always lay his hand in preference to waiting for Macaulays and De Quinceys in the bush. Even in the most choice magazines, the purple patches are sewn on a certain amount of padding, which the Editor knows by experience can be done well enough by So or So, each in his own line of ability ; while it is the interest of the publisher to throw crumbs among the flock of authors fluttering half-tamed about his premises. In weekly and still more in daily journalism, the further consideration of haste comes in : the Editor may have scant time to read manuscripts, but must commission writers whom he can trust to deal with this or that subject. In varying degrees, all periodical publications are manned by a regular crew, among whom a raw aspirant finds it not always easy to enter as cabin boy or stowaway. This is in the nature of things. But the outsider need usually count on no " influence " beyond his possible usefulness to the publication ; and if editors, after many disappointments, prove difficult to convince on



this head, they are perhaps as often inclined to strain a point in favour of a literary conscript.

Such a recruit does not always well in forcing himself on the personal acquaintance of an editor, who is like to be wary of interviews, all the more when he prints the varying conditions on which he is prepared, or not prepared to "consider" the proffers of aspirants. Less harm is done by presenting oneself to publishers, since every Jorkins is apt to have a Spenlow, who may serve as buffer for polite refusal. If Trollope's hints are to be trusted, however, there is one exception to the above rule : young and comely Sapphos, it appears, may not always be so unbusiness-like in their fond desire of *viva voce* communication with an editor, who happens to be a man.

I can remember once being asked to see an editor, and she was a woman, daughter of Captain Marryat. The result of this interview turned out important for her. To a magazine she conducted, I had offered an account of an extraordinary spiritual *séance*, such as was then a novel sensation in London. The lady wished to let me understand that while she would like to publish my article, she durst not risk scandalizing her readers. Since she seemed hardly sure whether to take me for accomplice or dupe of the uncanny doings in question, I, who had treated the matter solely from an observer's point of view, advised her to see such a performance for herself, as given by a couple of American mediums, afterwards exposed as arrant humbugs. She went, accordingly, accompanied by another popular novelist, and was treated to a show of signs and wonders, with religious sentiments uttered by invisible spirits in a strong Yankee accent. Though both these ladies had disguised themselves by taking off their wedding-rings, Mr. and Mrs. Sludge

were cunning enough to guess at and call forth the spirit of a dead child that worked its effect on one of the visitors. This was at a high tide of mediumship, when one of our most distinguished men of science, having set out armed *cap à pie* to quell the monster, was presently found pining in its dungeons. My incredulous editress, who went to scoff, remained converted to become a doughty champion of spiritualism, in defence of which she wrote two or three volumes, one of them, I observe, attributing my part in the matter to a gentleman of our common acquaintance, who was at the time confined in a lunatic asylum. From this story I draw the moral that an editor's judgment is not infallible, either when speaking *ex cathedrâ*, or in private life.

My own experience of editors, however, has been peculiar rather than extensive. The other day a chord was struck in my memory by learning from Mr. W. D. Howells' *Literary Friends*, how an early poem of his, after many adventures of rejection, at last found un hoped-for favour with an English editor about to start a "Shilling Magazine." This was Mr. Samuel Lucas, whose name I remember gratefully as the only editor who ever made advances to me as an unknown writer. If I remember right, I had offered a paper to a periodical with which he was connected, then, this periodical coming to an end, Mr. Lucas wrote to me, as to Mr. Howells at Venice, inviting my services in his new venture. Naturally, I admired his discrimination. But when he had printed one article of mine, our patron died untimely, as, I think, did his magazine, so that neither Mr. Howells nor myself got much good out of this gleam of encouragement. Since then, I have seldom been in favour with editors, who, perhaps found me a little difficult to drive in harness.

I had one friend who became an editor, with some friction to our friendship. For his periodical I wrote a story, of which one scene was laid at a Shoeblacks' home. Being strong on the "document," after my French models, I visited such a refuge, and painted it from the life as cold and cheerless. My editor, being on kindly terms with a chief promoter of such charitable efforts, objected to this description as likely to offend the personage in question, and wished me to give my faithful picture a thick wash of *couleur de rose*; but I stubbornly declined to sophisticate facts, for if truth be fled from among writers of fiction, where indeed shall she find refuge on the face of the earth?

From the Editor's function as patron and selector, we pass on to consider him as corrector, in which capacity he may be a guide to young authors, not always grateful, and a bugbear to old ones who find their most elaborate sentences curtailed or deleted. One remembers the outcries of Southey and Sydney Smith under the hacking about of Quarterly editors, who were perhaps more chary of meddling with the style of Macaulay or Carlyle: the latter Sampson, indeed, once appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* shorn of all his hirsute force. But writers should not complain of such emending interference, when they have undertaken to treat anonymously a subject which must be adapted to the size, the tone, and the traditions of an organ which takes all responsibility for their opinions. Alterations of style or statement should here of course be a matter of more or less delicacy; but when "No flowers, by request," is the rule, an editor must be ruthless in pruning the paragraphs of florid contributors. Such a work as the *Dictionary of National Biography*, for instance—as it stands, a loss



and an honour to its publisher—could never have been kept within reasonable limits but for a watchful censorship that proved too much for its first editor's health. And a very little practical experience, of course, would have hindered the Rev. Homer Wilbur A.M. from offering his fast-day discourse to be printed in the *Jaalam Courier*, with the remark that “by omitting the advertisements, it might easily be got within the limits of a single number.”

As for that pulpit which “the editor mounts daily, sometimes with a congregation of fifty thousand”—five hundred thousand?—one editor in Mr. Biglow's country now counts his flock by millions—within reach of his voice, and never a nodder, even, among them, the convention is clear for unlimited despotism of the absolute “we.” The newspaper potentate can edit a Balaam's very blessings into curses, or *vice versa*; and the prophet who will not submit to this law must prophesy under his own name, perhaps at his own expense. One remembers hearing both sides of a grievance that caused an able leader-writer to resign his commission, and seek fortune on another path leading him to the bench. He complained to me that a “not” had been inserted in every sentence by the editor, who drily explained how the writer “took quite the wrong view.” Such rubs, of course, are avoided by employing writers who take the right view; and some of the free-lances of Fleet Street seem able readily to take any view that may be required of them, to judge by the ease with which they transfer their services from the Wallenstein Post to the Gustavus Adolphus Gazette. One has known such a writer of fortune engaged on both sides at once, wherein he is at least as honourable as prosperous firms that bring forth from the same fount both sweet waters and

bitter, flavoured with sparkling Toryism at one tap and at another frothed to a democratic head.

Fleet Street has many tales and legends of editors who bore the blue pencil not in vain. One represents a mere underling as stealing the editorial thunderbolt, to the scathe of a colleague. It is told of a once copious journalist, noted as more ready with copy than with coin of the realm; this gentleman's hatter, in pressing him for payment, had hinted how he would cry quits to his bill, if the customer could name his establishment in a leading article. Promising to try his best, the journalist scribbled an article on Hats, beginning with the days of Herodotus and working round to our own time, so as artfully to bring in his creditor's name. This he kept by him till, as will happen in a newspaper office, an article had to be dropped in haste, and he was called on to fill the gap with a kind of literary fagot for which that paper had no small reputation. In went his article on Hats, and he stayed after the editor to make sure that the main point had not been deleted. Next day he betook himself to his hatter, who received him with an unexpectedly frowning countenance, explained when he saw his article marred by one slight alteration. Another contributor, perhaps in debt to his own hatter, had stayed behind to change the important name for that of a rival over the way. This is a story of the last generation. Alas! the newspapers of our day often display lying articles that have no other intent than to advertise hatters, tailors, milliners and the like, no doubt for value received—"and my people love to have it so!"

The "We" which once covered most printed deliverances, has its use and virtue still in periodical literature. So long as a writer be not responsible,

the Editor's prerogative is unquestioned. What the former furnishes is a raw material which another hand may trim, cut and elaborate to the required gloss, shape and pattern. That is the bargain: so long as the craftsman gets his agreed pounds per thousand words or pence per line, he has no right to complain. He can complain with more reason on finding his pay docked as well as his style. The case may be reversed. An author, now fugleman of his own company, has feelingly described to me his first interview with an editor, for whom his prentice hand had written a review of an important work on a subject of which he himself thus began to be recognized among the masters. At the time he was in need of money, and when he saw the editorial pen run through certain paragraphs, his heart sank under the calculation of how many shillings were being marked off his remuneration. But "Come!" said the editor, "this is too good to waste on one article. We must make two or three of it." Thus was this esurient author bidden to mount the heaven of success, and mounted accordingly, when he had got such a leg up.

But when the author gives out his work under his own name, he has a right to say "a poor thing, but mine own." There is a real grievance, when an editor undertakes to titivate his contribution, except by consent, for appearance before the public. I am sorry to say that, in my experience, editors show a tendency to presume on their power more and more of late years. It is in the lower and more mechanical workshops of literature, of course, that the author must submit to being clipped, filed and brushed; but even editors who should know better are found playing the literary barber. I once wrote a signed article in



a magazine that stood among the best. When it appeared, I found how, after the proofs had passed me, the editor had put in some touches of his own, whereby I was made to appear as if I knew as little of the subject as he did himself. Even a poet may have to submit to being edited. Samuel Butler's *Psalm of Montreal*, that whimsical effusion of which he gave me the proof sheet, might certainly have startled the readers of a most discreet periodical had it appeared there as he originally wrote it.

Authors should stand out against such interference, as they are not backward in doing, when they can afford it. No writer ought to have the power of meddling with another's work, which is an expression of personality in proportion to its worth. Inky fingers too readily itch to alter a way of putting things that comes natural to another mind ; but your Ben Jonsons are not to be trusted to blot the lines of Shakespeare. An editor, by the very nature of his occupation, is apt to be dull, precise, with a preference for the commonplace, the obvious, the jog-trot, and he has seldom time to spare over considerations that may have cost the author much labour of the file. His taste is usually for potted phrases rather than for sappy flowers of speech. I think with shame and horror of one little, little book bearing my name, which the proprietor has had gone over by some one whose task was to translate all idiomatic and racy expressions into the corresponding *clichés* of the newspaper. Another editor of mine, who had more right of criticism, was very free with suggestions ; then I could not but chuckle to note how when I had quoted from masters and models of style, his hasty blue pencil was no less censorious of their diction than of my own. Fancy such an editor let loose on the contortions of

Carlyle, on the conceits of Charles Lamb, on the cadences of Ruskin, on the oracles of Emerson !

Some of the most lively authors, indeed, are just those who would dance with the worst grace in fetters of criticism. How many of our standard writers have their notable lapses, solecisms, queer tricks of tongue, sheer blunders of which no able editor could ever be guilty ! The very classics on which our taste is formed take liberties with syntax and prosody for which a schoolboy would have been flogged in days when to break Priscian's head entailed a punishment the reverse of capital. Such masters are not likely to be superseded by the impeccable prize-poems of their scholars. Yet the schoolmaster has been abroad in literature, correcting its old licences with the pen of the Lindley Murrays, pruning vagrant individualities to smooth outline, weeding out poppies as well as tares from well-trimmed beds of speech, and rejecting such wild flowers as "early risers of literature" loved to pluck "with the dew still on them," and the earth, perhaps, sticking to their roots.

Our language has been carefully tamed, broken in to hackney paces, trained to keep rank and step, in a word edited, since Shakespeare wrote "I am appointed *him* to murder you," and the English Bible was quite Scotch or Irish in its use of *shall* and *will*. Chaucer might nowadays have to do with editors who would not allow him to "deemen to the *badder* end." Milton would be rapped over the knuckles by the editorial pencil for his "fairest of her daughters, Eve," which yet has passed for a phrase *matre pulchra filia pulchrior*. The scholarly divine in *Amelia* exclaims that a fourth-form boy would deserve whipping for such false concord as *Varium et mutabile femina*. "Every schoolboy" has been taught to flout Byron for

his "there let him lay!" Neatness and uniformity in style are the only wear of a generation of writers fain to seek after originality rather in motley affectation of ideas. So the verbal corrector grows mighty as embodying the spirit of our age.

"Boys and blackguards have always been my masters in language," owns J. R. Lowell, who, I think, would have agreed with me in deploring our taste for clipping and trimming the English of our forefathers. Before I ever heard his name, I had taken to the same school of improvement. My most diligent studies in style were pursued in listening to cricket-players on a village green or roisterers in a Devonshire public-house, from whose careless talk I delighted to pick up hedgerow blooms, racy of the soil. But such are an abomination to the editorial mind, as to the pedantic schoolmasters who go about to root out good old idioms like "Try and do it," or "all but over." Not long ago I wrote, what every one says, "a dog to play with," which for the edification of youth was altered into "a dog with which to play." In this spirit a certain pedant is reported as rebuking his pupil—"I told you, sir, that a preposition was not a word to end a sentence *with*!" But let me err with Milton, Bunyan and Defoe, rather than be correct with the contemporary Priscian, whose head I should like to break for artificial rules of grammar that are, in Dr. Johnson's corrected phrase, "fundamentally unsound."

One cause is clear for the editor waxing and the mere author waning in the present moon of our history. John Bull's taste in literary fare has undergone a change very marked since dinners *à la Russe* came into fashion. In old days, he stuck by choice to substantial joints, seasoned perhaps with rather



unwholesome pickles, and washed down with draughts of full-bodied vintages. He who cared to read at all was not afraid to tackle a quarto or a folio, that came to table over and over again, or stood always in cut, salted by the respect of generations. Now the reader demands something new at each meal, served up in a tempting way, and with all the variety he finds in his beloved periodicals. These cater for him with cunning kickshaws, with pungent sauces, with spicy snippets, with a *pièce de resistance* of fiction, handed round in slices, yet also with sweet and savoury *plats*, on a table that appeals to the eye as well as the tongue, while the barrel organ of advertisement supplies music to help lazy digestion. The up-to-date author has shown some ingenuity in adapting himself to furnish forth such a *menu*, but its success depends much on the *chef*, whose title is the Editor. A full-flavoured haunch of venison would seem out of place in the repasts he composes. Give him rather a lump of frozen mutton, and trust to him for turning out just the *ragoût* that will satisfy his patrons.

It is the simple truth that many of the magazines of to-day, and not a few of its books, depend for their success on a kind of dullness. The art of sinking has to be cultivated by their proprietors, as writers have toiled after grace and eloquence. They appeal to a mob of readers who would be scared away by any hint of genius. Nothing pays so well as the commonplace, tricked out in the mode of the hour. A prosperous firm that has done much to popularize periodical literature, used to keep among its staff of editors one of whom the joke went that he served as *dunceometer*: if any venture did not pay, he would be put in charge of it to bring it down to a meaner capacity. I have a sad experience of my own to note, after having had

to do with almost every magazine of a certain class that has been started in my time, then nearly all of them came to die as surely as it deserved to live, while those that have thriven find their depth of earth in very common clay. So here again the wary editor is more useful than the author, who will not be worth his salt at this business, if he cannot bend to the idols of its market-place. It is the author with most breeding in him that runs least patiently in such harness. The editor is a better-broken animal, that may be trusted not to go scampering and sniffing after shadowy fancies, so he gets his feed of corn and his snug stable, while the untamed steed grazes on thorny deserts, and leaves its bones to fatten richer pastures. Yet indeed the best groomed and fed of all is the Pegasus with lively action, that has had the luck to learn smart paces and clever tricks which may be shown off with applause in the circus of periodical literature.

The author can seldom do his best without trying to please himself. The Editor's task is rather to please his public. The public is to be pleased in different ways ; but it is apt to be shy of personality, originality, and strong convictions. This means much dwelling on matters of no importance, leaving all controvertible questions to be aired in the special yards of sect or party, where again the great point is to give no offence by ideas not of the approved pattern.

So it comes that religion sets the Editor upon his highest horse. Their forms of faith and worship are the poetry of life to many worthy folk in our land ; there are others who at least cherish the antipathies of their creed ; and the more serious-minded of these believers cause a demand for reading that has been

carefully edited to suit their point of view. Unfortunately their point of view is not always that of one who tries to "see life steadily and see it whole ;" and the gratifying of their consciences leads to a sad tampering with facts, more or less honestly undertaken by authors who in this work are no better than editors. We know how bigotry has edited the mind of whole peoples, not yet risen up from intellectual abasement ; but we hardly see how, in his present mood of idle toleration or indifference to all creeds but his own, Mr. John Bull, too, is in danger of growing flabby in respect for the truth, which one eminent author tried in vain to honour by spelling it with a capital T.

In my youth one had to be more careful about outraging orthodox Protestantism, while Giant Pope was taken to be so crazy and stiff in his joints that any scribbler might venture a shy at him. But in our time, when Giant Pagan, too, has been galvanized into some show of life, that other ex-bugbear seems to have taken a new lease of loyalty among Bunyan's countrymen. So skilled editors are made aware how in the treatment of historical questions it is not nowadays so necessary to consider Protestant susceptibilities, but rather those of Catholics whom the truth finds more ticklish : the state of the less regarded Protestant seems the more gracious. Between them poor Clio has often been led astray.

I have been asked to write a school history of Europe which should make no mention of the Reformation, nor of incidents going to show that some popes have borne characters hardly fit for canonization. There is a tale told of the late Pope Leo, that should open the eyes of ostrich-like believers who think it safer to bury their heads in sand. In introducing a cele-



brated historian to the Vatican library, this pope is said to have impressed upon him that he was to feel by no means restricted in his use of its contents, adding with a twinkle in his eye, "There are some good people who would like to edit the Scriptures, cutting out the story of Peter and the cock, for instance, lest it should bring discredit on the Holy See." The *Pilgrim's Progress* has actually been edited in the interest of Catholic teachers, who thus make John Bunyan recommend views of religion that to him would have been anathema.

There are, indeed, Protestants as well as Catholics willing to have the truth edited for them. In our country, blessed with a hundred religions and only one sauce, as graceless wits of the Continent reproach us, there have thriven certain societies, concerned to publish and advertise certain forms of religious doctrine, all others being put upon their Index Expurgatorius. These societies have found their profit in bringing out also books not expressly religious, yet usually flavoured more or less strongly with the particular sauce that is their undertaking's *raison d'être*. I often wonder as to one book, how it would fare if brought for the first time, as a new work, before the consideration of any such society. That book is the English Bible. One feels pretty sure of its being declined with thanks, or accepted for publication only with a good deal of editorial correction and improvement.

I remember well my first encounter with the censor of a publishing society. He seemed to me to have some such concern with its publications as "M. Auguste" used to show in getting into the way of every one in the circus ring; but I was given to understand that this official had a keen *flair* for any

suspicion of unsound doctrine, which made him most useful to his employers, in spite of a testy temper and a contented ignorance of literature. When once I had written a story for one of the magazines under his control, he sent for me to let me know how I offended against one of the articles of the society's faith. To avoid offence, the actual dogma in question need not be stated : let us call it  $x$ ,  $y$ , or say, a persuasion that the moon is made of green cheese. It is a belief natural to a certain stage in human development, which for a time has been held by one section of the Christian Church. No person capable of judging on the matter now holds it in respect. The historic Churches have quietly dropped it out of their creeds ; yet, perhaps for that reason, it still remains in credit with certain sectaries. The consideration of it had never occurred to me ; and heedlessly I had used a phrase implying that the moon was made, perhaps, of red-currant jelly. What my editor had to tell me was that he, of course, knew better than to suppose the moon made of green cheese, yet that it must be so represented in the publications of his society. In those days I was young enough to have much trust in human nature ; and I do not forget my generous contempt for a man who took money to say or have said what he believed untrue.

Each of the chief shades of opinion as to the nature of the moon and other subjects, supports a publishing society by which the facts of life are duly edited to suit its doctrines. At one time these "concerns," a title officially adopted by one of them, were content with putting forth matter of doctrine ; but they have gone on to publish fiction, history, science and books of amusement, all tuned to the dominant note or at least not in discord with it. The fiction, for instance,

may sail pretty close to the doctrinal wind, gratifying an unregenerate taste up to a certain point, in the end to be brought up with an orthodox moral. There used to run a tale of one society which by its articles was bound to set forth in every publication what is called the "scheme of salvation." When it proposed to produce a book on natural history, the author was in despair as to the introduction of that doctrinal feature; but the editor pointed out how it might be done in connection with the chimpanzee: "the chimpanzee is in many respects like man, but in one all-important respect they are unlike; the chimpanzee has no soul," etc.

It is easy to see how the editor is here *in excelsis*. The figureheads of the enterprise are like to be well-meaning gentlemen not versed in the business they profess to conduct, qualified mainly by zeal for the principles they seek to foster. The helm is in the hands of paid officials, to whom principles are a matter of interest. They practically direct a business which is not their own; and they would be more than mortal, if they did not sometimes take on the insolence of office towards the class of writers employed by them as content with small pay, and usefully subservient to a potentate beset with the temptations of the shop-walker, the slave-driver and the inquisitor. An editor, set in such authority, unchecked by considerations of private profit and loss, is very apt to play the pasha.

I could tell some woeful tales of what I have known authors obliged to bear from those gang-masters cracking a doctrinal whip. In my own experience, I have never but once known a publisher refuse to carry out a clear contract. That publisher was a religious society, whose directors, honest men individually I doubt not, let themselves be bamboozled by a



cunning official, who took advantage of my having for the moment mislaid his written undertaking—I found it since, and may publish it some day as an illustration of the difference between practice and profession. That same society had a little time before published a story of mine in which I had spoken of a parish clergyman as on his way to administer the sacrament to a dying man; no such iniquity indeed happened *coram populo*, but I had suggested this as reason for the parson being out at night, a most unprotestant idea which the editor altered into the catch-word of his sect “to engage in prayer.” Even so do Pharisees of all sects pay tithe of mint, anise and cummin, while omitting—the rest of the verse is familiar.

This is an old story, forms of once vital faith ossified into a smug making the best of both worlds, sanding the sugar but not forgetting to come to prayers. No circle of Satan’s invisible world displayed stirs an honest man’s gorge like mean dealings on the part of Mr. Facing-both-ways who, while punctually paying rent for his villa in Clapham or Clapton, takes care to insure an eternal mansion where orthodox belief will be the title to respectability. Yet as often as religion has been debased by its professed pundits, from priest to local preacher, so often have arisen new teachers, poets, prophets, and tellers of true parables, in a word authors, who have refused to let their contributions to human welfare be edited.

The religious editor is specially apt to grow bloated, as circumstances make him master of the business in an unusual degree. But the altered conditions of the publishing trade bring about in general a rising demand for editorship, as small shop-keepers become heads of departments in gigantic stores. The old-fashioned

publisher who was his own manager, who dealt with his authors face to face, to whom their good will and good word was a valuable asset in his business, seems to be shoved aside by larger concerns whose transactions require many foremen and overseers, all working together to the amassing of a dividend. This kind of joint-stock publishing has thriven mightily since a popular novelist could thus, some twenty years ago, describe the business of "Meeson's."

The firm employed more than two thousand hands; and its works, lit throughout with the electric light, cover two acres and a quarter of land. One hundred commercial travellers, at three pounds a week and a commission, went forth east and west, and north and south, to sell the books of Meeson (which were largely religious in their nature) in all lands; and five-and-twenty tame authors (who were illustrated by thirteen tame artists) sat—at salaries ranging from one to five hundred a year—in vault-like hutches in the basement, and week by week poured out that hat-work for which Meeson's was justly famous. Then there were editors and vice-editors, and heads of the various departments, and sub-heads, and financial secretaries, and readers, and many managers; but what their names were no man knew, because at Meeson's all the employés of the great house were known by numbers; personalities and personal responsibility being the abomination of the firm. Nor was it allowed to any one having dealings with these items ever to see the same number twice, presumably for fear lest the number should remember that he was a man and a brother, and his heart should melt towards the unfortunate, and the financial interests of Meeson's should suffer. In short, Meeson's was an establishment created for and devoted to money-making, and the fact was kept studiously and even insolently before the eyes of everybody connected with it.

"It's piety that pays!" exclaimed the head of this firm; but since his day new companies, syndicates or expanded partnerships have opened other markets for trading wholesale upon the various sheepishness of the public, scampering into separate flocks that may be profitably penned, fed and shorn each by an

experienced editor. Such businesses promote demand for a kind of authorship which is only raw material to be spun, dressed, and dyed by editorial machinery. The division of labour, it appears, can here be turned to account, one man making the plot of a story, another sketching out the characters, a third filling in the conversations, and a deft hand giving the final gloss. Thus is turned out in huge quantities a cheap "line" of machine-made reading, which, pushed by the arts of boom and by clever devices, pleases the foolish majority better than hand-made literature. It looks as if Pegasus, so often meanly bitted and bridled, were in the next generation to be transformed into a motor-car, with the editor for chauffeur, and what used to be the author used up as fuel. It is already told of one popular novelist that he finds a gold mine in bringing up to date forgotten stories of another generation, editing its sentiment into slang, changing nabobs into South African millionaires, four-in-hands into automobiles, whist into bridge, and so forth. There are stories enough extant to keep all the race of readers a-going for generations to come, by help of artful editing.

The brisk demand for manufactured shoddy, or for old coats turned, makes indeed, a poor look-out for the "hands" of this industry. One finds hope in observing that these factories at present see their account in turning out the standard works of English literature in cheap editions, that may give raw readers a chance of distinguishing what ought to be read from what pays to sell. Yet the apparent popularity of classical reprints, too, puts the living author out of pocket, while making work for the editor, employed to select, introduce and annotate the dead lion, who can even be stuffed by certain editorial arts. More than one



presumptuous editor of our day has undertaken to abridge Scott for the impatience of a generation trained on tit-bits and reviews of reviews. My own conscience sometimes smites me, *quum pituita molesta est*, that in a popular edition, I cut out the oaths by which Jane Austen thought to carry off the character of a dashing young blood.

Much more might be said on this suggestive subject ; but enough has been said to show how, under present conditions, the author tends to be eclipsed by the editor. An author by rights is one who writes what, as he imagines, ought to be said. An editor's task is to prepare what, as he judges, readers are willing to have said. Every now and again the author insists on being heard ; *laudatur et alget* ; but always the editor thrives by studying the conditions of literature as a business. It would be death to the mind of any nation that permanently enslaved authorship to editorship. Till lately, China had the name of being the best edited country in the world, unless its neighbour Korea bore away that palm. But one knows another country that has been the author of its own fame and fortune, yet now seems much inclined to submit to political as well as literary editing.

## IX

### CRITICS.

ANOTHER by-product of literature is the critic, who makes a modest, regular and more or less honest living by pointing out the faults or merits of his fellow-authors. So great has been the need of using this function for blame that the critic, who ought to sit as a judge and a law-giver, came to be looked on by authors as a counsel for their prosecution, or even as chastiser of their offences ; and the word criticism, like "Each man's *censure*," has overbalanced itself towards its harsher implication. Even in our more humane days, when the critical scourge is seldom knotted, authors grow up with an instinctive dread of this corregidor, though they may affect the indifference of Sir Fretful Plagiary, or the Archbishop of Granada's welcome for a warning voice.

The present writer's policy, then, should be to propitiate such important opinions after the manner of Mr. Sergeant Buzfuz in appealing to "an enlightened, a high-minded, a right-feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathizing, a contemplative jury." But I present myself as bound to speak the truth, a witness rather than an advocate, free to deal critically with the pretensions of his arbiters. All I will do in my own interest, is to throw this chapter so far on in

the book that it may have a chance to escape the notice of readers likely to find offence in it. Many years ago, a well-known author gave me advice which has often justified itself: to put into the preface what I wanted a critic to say, who would very possibly save himself trouble by reading not much further. There are many such "reviewers," with whom, for once, I venture to deal faithfully, as they do not always with the like of me.

Every son of Adam is born a critic, as sensitive authors know. The most stolid layman, unable to claim benefit of clergy by his own pen or pencil, will give you his blunt judgment on any work of art, which if he likes not, why then "he likes it not, perdy." I recall among the acquaintances of my youth a Tony Lumpkin, playfully styled "the Missing Link," who was wont to express his contempt for "all literary stuff," from Shakespeare downwards, the seamy side of such scorn being a most laughable trust in his own innate wisdom, that was clearly to seek. He presented only a caricature of much lay opinion. But I let pass the amateur critic, who never could write a verse, unless "Let's to the Prado, and make the most of time!" The prisoner at our bar is the professional writer who undertakes to tell an author whether and how far he have failed or succeeded, and be a taster for the general reader, whose palate indeed often requires help in distinguishing caviare from the popular brands of ambrosia.

To the author, how useful should be an honest and competent critic, especially if his services could be brought to bear before the page were irrevocably in print! Most often your poor scribbler has no advice but from critics on the hearth, too apt to be kind to the virtues and blind to the faults of his work. After



the pains and perils that went to bring it to birth, he himself cannot but see the child of his imagination with an indulgent eye,—

Strabonem

Appellat Pætum pater, et Pullum male parvus

Si cui filius est, ut abortivus fuit olim

Sisyphus.

Even if he shrink not from the task of correction, it is hard for him to view his handiwork in clear proportion and perspective. "I, reading and re-reading, patching and touching continually, grew so accustomed to my bantling's face, that, like a mother, I could not tell whether it were handsome or hideous," confesses a modern author. When permitted to examine close at hand Sir William Richmond's mosaics in St. Paul's, one is surprised to find a roughly and coarsely frittered surface that shows so radiantly impressive at a little distance. Even so, the author must laboriously fit in his details, which come before his eyes with microscopic enlargement and dulling familiarity, till he is in danger of losing their general effect, unless he can put the pattern by, to examine it with the fresh discrimination of nine years' forgetfulness. Even then, the creative not being the same as the critical eye, authors are like to make poor critics, *à fortiori* of their own works, as often they want relish for those of their rivals. Swinburne, so outspoken in his likes and dislikes, did not care for Byron, who did not care for Wordsworth and abused Southey. Wordsworth cared chiefly for his own verse, though Jeffrey pronounced that it would "never do." Dr. Johnson had no great opinion of Gray, nor duly revered Milton, who himself, we understand, thought more of *Paradise Regained* than of *Paradise Lost*. William Morris looked coldly both on Milton and

Wordsworth. George Meredith sniffed at the "jewelry" of Tennyson, who found the reading of Meredith like "wading through glue." Tennyson's own "pet bantling" was *Maud*, which the critics received with a chorus of scolding. His friend Edward Fitzgerald had the queerest quips of taste and repugnance. We know what scornful judgments Carlyle passed on the works of his contemporaries, as Harriet Martineau on their characters. To De Quincy Keats' poetry seemed mere "waxwork filigree" and "gilt gingerbread." Charlotte Brontë did not relish Jane Austen. Macaulay, so enthusiastic over Jane Austen and Richardson, shut his eyes on the rising star of Dickens, and detested Carlyle's style, as his own has been denounced by later critics. Goethe, himself a bore to some authors, was bored by Dante and saw nothing great in Victor Hugo. Charles Lamb pooh-poohed *Faust* as a "disagreeable, canting tale of seduction." Sir H. Taylor found Burns "tedious." Tourgenief could not stand ten pages of Balzac. Tolstoi thought little of Shakespeare, who has by many writers been judged "overrated," by Wordsworth for one, if we can trust Lamb's report; but such presumptuous criticism is usually kept unpublished. Hallam and Carlyle called out against each others' histories. W. S. Landor had no more admiration for Spenser than for Dryden, nor for "such trash as *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister*." More than one celebrated author indeed might have sat for Sir Fretful Plagiary, "who could abide no books but his own." And when we go back to the ancients, we find them too by no means classics for one another.

It must be noted, however, that there is a special class of authors whose *forte* and function is criticism in the higher sense, men like Sainte-Beuve, or our own

Leslie Stephen. Such men, as a rule, create little or nothing admirable of their own, but bring their talent to a focus for understanding, explaining and estimating the work of others, with more or less keen and safe *flair* for merits as well as faults. But not every writer is tall enough to take the altitude of critics who are critics indeed ; so I confine myself to a larger brood who seem by no means above criticism, such as they get from one of their own *Dii majores*, Hazlitt to wit, in his account of the common reviewer's relation to authors. " He considers them as pensioners on his bounty for any pittance of praise, and in general sets them up as butts for his wit and spleen, or uses them as a stalking-horse, to convey his own favourite notions and opinions, which he can do by this means without the possibility of censure or appeal." But, indeed, critics of Hazlitt's calibre are sometimes found firing into each other, or coming near to blow up their own reputations by some resoundingly rash judgment. New authors have often to go through an ordeal of snubbing from critics who cannot readily adjust the focus of a judgment long exercised according to outworn rules. In much poring over print, a true lover of literature, and with him perhaps a whole coterie, sometimes appears to contract a mental short-sight, even a squint, as when one Aristarchus pronounces *Daniel Deronda* the best of George Eliot's works, or another sets up for worship some odder idol, *e.g.* in the case of Lamb's admiration for the Duchess of Newcastle's works, and the relish in his circle for Amory's eccentric *Life of John Bunce*. More than one volume has been filled, or spiced, with the blunders and heresies of celebrated critics, exposing themselves to the chuckles of every authorling.

It may be noted that the great critics have most



successfully exercised their skill on great authors, long dead and widely read : it is in dealing with contemporaries they seem more apt to judge amiss. And if the Tritons of literature cannot be depended on for catholic soundness of taste, what may we expect of the small fry who produce the reviews—in most cases more fitly named “ notices ”—of new books for the guidance of the public ? One knows what we get at the mouth of “ those scribes, who expound the law from their pulpits in the reviews, weekly, monthly, quarterly ”—and daily. I have naturally looked at thousands of such notices dealing with my own books, and the upshot is to leave me in a very critical frame of mind towards my critics. How seldom did one find a useful hint, a pregnant warning ; how often has one been treated with mere sneers or careless compliments ; how little trouble had most of these valuers taken to estimate what may have cost the author so much pains ! In the same number of one leading organ, I have had the chance to be reviewed both favourably and unfavourably, as a writer under different names. Another, then bearing no less high a rank, described me one year as not knowing the elements of my craft, and a year later made amends by styling me one of the best writers on the same subject. The same periodical has spoken sweet and bitter things of the same book of mine, twice submitted to its judgment in different editions. Like other touchy scribes, I have more than once been provoked into challenging a verdict which could be proved as given in the teeth of the evidence. In my salad days, I was green enough to publish a selection of hasty criticisms, arranged alternately *pro* and *con* ; and I now quote them, exactly as they stood more than forty years ago.

## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

The ——— Standard.

"There is neither wit nor wisdom, satire nor good fooling in it."

The ——— Observer.

"We have here a very amusing little brochure, which will afford a good hearty laugh to every reader in these dull days."

The ——— Telegraph.

"The book altogether reads like an elaborate and decidedly feeble April joke."

The ——— Chronicle.

"It is long since we have been so much amused by any literary brochure."

The ——— Advertiser.

"The last part of the paper, 'A visit to the Infernal Regions,' is objectionable in itself, and not ably executed."

The ——— Chronicle.

"The article entitled 'A visit to the Infernal Regions' is full of vigorous satire."

The ——— Journal.

"We confess to having read it half through, but, judging from the contents of the first half, we did not think the second half worth the trouble."

The ——— Guardian.

"Having thoroughly enjoyed it ourselves, we recommend our readers to purchase the elegant little volume, and judge for themselves."

The ——— Telegraph.

"We cannot profess to regard this jeu d'esprit as a favourable specimen even of Scotch wit."

The ——— Herald.

"The sketches are very clever, and the little volume extremely amusing."

How can a young writer steer his course by help of such winds of Æolus let loose upon him from port and starboard? It is, of course, the beginner who

has most to learn from honest and judicious appreciation, which he is least likely to secure, unless on this consideration, that the hasty critic hardly knows the correct thing to say about him. He, also, is more sensitive to such worthless praise or blame, more easily puffed up by windy applause, and more sorely punctured into collapse. Is there any callow author who may not confess to having eagerly looked out for his first notices in the press, almost as sacramental as the marriage of his maiden thought to print and paper? But, by and by, if he kept on treading that path of thistles and briars as well as primroses, he grows hardened to pricks and rents in his self-satisfaction, and more doubtful of the flattery that once flew to his empty head. He will not even be too much confounded when his slips in grammar, or his printers' in spelling, are held up to reproach. The critic has a keen nose and a sweet tooth for such matters of mint and cummin, as to which some authors can afford to be careless.

Poluphloisboisterous Homer of old  
Chuck'd all his augments into the sea,  
Although he had often been candidly told  
That perfects imperfect begin with an *e* :  
But the Poet replied with a dignified air,  
"What the Digamma does any one care!"

There was a period in my career when I ceased to pay much attention to periodical criticism of my own work. But in those years I had a charge to select and purchase all the best new books published in English. For this purpose, I carefully studied the reviews supposed to be of chief authority, as well as others that spoke of current drifts of taste ; then, over and over again, I found myself deceived by their recommendations. The strange thing is that one



could expect illuminating guidance, being by this time so much behind the scenes as to be familiar with the lanterns.

Later on, I fell into the wiles of press-cutting agencies ; and for some years past, I have made a collection of notices relating to myself. Viewing them with the calmer eye of age and experience, I come back to my old opinion that, as a rule, they were seldom worth reading, or writing. Some few exceptions show care, judgment and knowledge of the matter, so might be welcomed even when they found fault. Others I have thought of nailing up, like dead vermin, as awful examples of spite or stupidity. My favourite specimen I cannot lay hands on, or I would print it as an instance of inept absurdity. It appeared in a religious journal, which poured compliments on a book of mine, the interest of the plot, the drawing of the characters, the moral of the story and so forth. But my book was a sober statement of fact, without plot or hero ; and the critic could have read no word of it beyond the title. A more recent notice, to which a lady boldly signs her name, declares her victim's "rather a dull production," but as she mis-describes its character, ascribes it to a wrong publisher, and is not even correct about its title, one can lay the soothing unction to one's soul that she did not get so far as the title page. And again another organ gives forth that whereas I once wrote good books of a certain kind, the one under dissection shows me to have sadly fallen off, this volume being, in fact, as the critic failed to observe, only a new edition of one of those earlier publications. I have had a volume of stories highly praised as "Essays." I have chuckled to find myself abused as incorrect in an identification of the fictitious scenes of Mr. Thomas Hardy's Wessex,

my critic not being aware that this page was kindly contributed by Mr. Hardy himself, who desired not to put his name to it. Every voluminous author must have a private museum of such boomerang missiles.

Instead of airing my own grievances against the critics, or showing myself not duly grateful for their good words, it will be more to the purpose to quote what famous authors have said about them. Sir Arthur Helps, for instance, divides critics under three heads.

1. There are those who are too timid or too fastidious to do anything themselves—men perhaps of considerable ability—and they naturally find an exercise for their abilities in criticizing the works of others.

2. There are the born critics, men whose powers naturally take the form of criticism.

3. There are the professional critics, who take up criticism as they would any other occupation which procures them a tolerably easy livelihood.

The doers are very averse from criticizing; and as they are the only persons who could criticize consummately, criticism is in general the worst done thing in the world.

I have already ventured to disagree with the dictum of the last paragraph: as to the rest, old Ben Jonson had much the same opinion, who belittles the critics of his day as “a kind of tinkers that make more faults than they mend.” Pope’s judgment is “Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss.” Johnson in the *Rambler* lets out his estimate of a trade he practised not much to his credit. Hazlitt’s has been already cited. We all know Disraeli’s jibe that critics are those who have failed in literature or art, to which has been moved the amendment, that they are rather those who have not begun to succeed. “We are literary cannibals, living on each other: what the

mulberry leaf is to the silkworm, the author's book is to the critical larvæ that feed upon it," exclaims Oliver Wendell Holmes, who had cause to be sore under a peculiarly provoking breed of stings, that elsewhere provoked him into saying "nature made critics from chips left over in her fashioning of authors." This is hardly so, at least in our British Grub Street, where many authors are fain to earn a crust as critics both before and after proving their mettle in original work. Froude puts it more shrewdly and justly: "in literature, the aspirant to fame begins upon the Bench, and when he has served his time in passing judgment on others, he descends to the Bar to practise on his own account." The same metaphor is worked out by Professor Edward Dowden (*Transcripts and Studies*, p. 261):—

The word "critic" by its derivation means a judge rather than an interpreter, and the function assumed by these ministers of literature resembles that of a magistrate on the bench. Now a crew of disorderly persons, often of the frailer sex, each of whom, more perhaps through weakness than wickedness, has been guilty of bringing into the world a novel in three volumes; now a company of abashed and shivering poetlings each charged with the crime of having uttered counterfeit verse, comes before his worship the reviewer, who lightly dismisses some with a caution, and sentences others to public laughter and the stocks during a week. And the sad thing is that though instances have been known in which a poetaster reformed and became a respectable citizen, the female novelist, having once erred, is lost to all sense of shame, and inevitably appears before the bench again and again, once at least in every six months, during the period of her natural life. We need this police and magistracy of literature, and we may cheerfully admit that, unless bribed by friendship or malice, they do in the main truly and indifferently administer justice of a rough-and-ready kind.

But, if in the company of petty poetical offenders there happen to be one true prophet—a Shelley, a Wordsworth, a Keats—the chances are that his worship the reviewer, hearing the evidence



against him, and being addressed by the prisoner in an unknown tongue, for which no interpreter can be found in the court or in the city, will, with irritated impatience, sentence him to the stocks for seven days, which under no circumstances can do him much harm, and which may teach him the advantages of learning to speak plain English. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Tennyson, Carlisle, Browning, Whitman—each in his day has stood in the stocks, and every fool has been free to throw a cabbage stump or a rotten egg at the convicted culprit.

But more than one wheel of this metaphor drags. The police-magistrate, whatever he may have been in the days of Fielding, is now likely to be a man of judgment, experience, caution, and knowledge of the law. The Solomon of the critical bench has given little security that he be other than a conceited ignoramus, with fads, fancies and prejudices for his code, often so pressed for time and so poorly paid that he cannot afford to go into the case with due attention. Magistrates have been known to accept the evidence of the police too readily; the mere appearance of a prisoner in the dock, grimy and haggard, seems to blot the legal presumption of innocence; yet a sensible justice is on his guard against the Rhadamanthus vein, and, in the spirit of the law which he administers, makes a point of honour to give the accused fair play; whereas one dressed in the critic's brief authority often displays himself chiefly concerned to unmuzzle his own wisdom and let off his smart sayings from the bench. Then the legal luminary, if so dim and smoky, is exposed to be sharply snuffed by the press that tends more and more to erect itself into a court of appeal in criminal cases. But there is no such supervision, almost no criticism of the critic, whose deliverances stand unrevised for his readers; and the only mitigation of his sentence lies in appeal to some dozens or scores of similar verdicts, the

upshot of which may well be to leave the prisoner himself in doubt whether he be guilty or innocent. His comfort in such bewilderment must be in comparing the critics to the bishop of Jowett's quip, who can say "you be damned," but is not really so formidable as the judge who can order you to be hanged, and you are hanged.

The worst of such a penalty is its being an unequal one, harder on Hudibras than on his squire, hardest on one whose sin of unregulated imagination magnifies and envenoms the punishment. The Bohemians and vagrants of real life become callous to it; such a delinquent is even known to snore in the pillory of public scorn; then in nine cases out of ten he is aware of getting what he deserves. But the peccant author is often made conscious of his crime only by its chastisement, and but half-conscious if his judges alternately apply the dock and the nettle. Some are so delicately constituted that no soothing applications can allay the smart. Some pine away, sick of suppressed good opinion of themselves. That seven days in the stocks may mean a sentence of silence for life.

Sensible authors, of course, take criticism for what it is worth, take down the useful hints, spit out the gritty lumps, and trust to time for digesting the most stodgy mass of opinion of their work. Some have philosophy enough to paste good notices in their albums, and light their pipes with bad ones. Most of us would rather be noticed unkindly than not noticed at all, which indeed is the capital sentence of criticism. But it is mere affectation in any author to pretend indifference to the infliction of being publicly corrected, even if he have grace enough to kiss the rod. This race is naturally thin-skinned and proverbially

irritable, doomed to learn in suffering what it may teach in improved song. Now and then its spirit proves so sensitive as to be snuffed out by an article. More than one admired author has been known to shrink from reading newspaper reviews of his books, or to have them filtered through some kind censorship, as Lewes guarded George Eliot's peace of mind. If ever there was a sane and wholesome-blooded author, above petty rancours and itchings, it was Walter Scott, yet one recalls how he lost his temper when a mere publisher ventured to criticize his handling of a romance. Kit North, who laid on the critical knout so heartily, confessed himself "sore and silly" as anyone when he felt it on his own shoulders. How then shall minor or meeker scribes suffer and be still, how above all if they feel themselves lashed by an anonymous and invisible executioner, showing neither soul to be damned nor corporeal parts to be kicked? Let them anoint their stripes at least by the consideration that an executioner is neither loved nor respected: nobody remembers Gifford or Croker with the warm affection in which names like Lamb, Keats and Hood are cherished. And when your Sainte-Beuves and such-like "drop into" verses of their own—well, we must remember Matthew Arnold as a striking exception, if not so in the eyes of Goldwin Smith.

That self-exiled Aristarchus was an approved but hardly a beloved author, whose *famulus* has recently revealed him as most sensitive to criticism while himself nothing if not hypercritical and "poly-antagonistic" in his judgments. Longfellow's poems, for him, were "barley-water," Browning's "metaphysics in cacophonous verse," Swinburne "a ranting, raving creature," Emerson's prose "a cataract of pebbles,"



much of Carlyle's "weird, hysterical, almost irrational oburgations against all that ever was," George Eliot "a second-rate Jane Austen padded with pseudo-philosophical language," then more recent novels he would lay down with exclamations as "chopped straw!"—"saw-dust!"—"pig-wash!" Yet this hanging judge sorely resented any prick to his own self-esteem, and all his life bore a spite against Disraeli for a certain caricature of an Oxford Professor.

There are, of course, celebrated cases of teased lions turning on their tormentors, to score them with tooth and claw, as when Dryden lifted himself up against Shadwell, and Pope made havoc among the heroes of the *Dunciad*. Tom Moore defied his censors in advance, by the mouth of the critical Fadladeen whom he brings forward in the interludes of *Lalla Rookh*. One would as little care to be in the seat of that critic whom Thackeray flayed by his *Essay on Thunder and Small Beer*, as in the skin of the poor publisher horsewhipped by Grantley Berkeley. Sometimes a mere suspected critic gets damned to an immortality of ill-fame. Byron lived to regret the indiscriminate way in which he mauled back among the Edinburgh Reviewers. In my college days, I just missed by a year sitting under a professor, in every corner of whose class-room irreverent youth had hacked out the stigma, half a century old—*Paltry Pillans*,—he who thus had been so long set among a whole form of whipping-boys for the real culprit, Brougham was it not? My father had a story to report of his generation, how, provoked by the illiterateness of some bucolic lad, Pillans rhetorically defied him to quote a single line of English poetry, and was answered back with that too lasting one—

Paltry Pillans shall traduce his friend!

Those were the heroic days of criticism, when Thackeray's Bludyer might slash to his heart's content at authors tied up for chastisement. It is only a birch-rod that is trusted to the latter-day critic, and that only in flagrant cases. The knout style of correction has quite gone out; and the bludgeon wielded by early reviewers is seldom called into play, even when two doughty champions meet man to man on an open stage, to show which can better guard his head. Indeed, the vice of reviewing, in our soft generation, is seen to be more often on the side of indulgence than of severity. To fall again for a moment into personal considerations, if I hit out at critics, it is not as goaded by wrongs of my own, having remarkably little to complain of in my running the gauntlet of some half-century's notices of the press. This good fortune is largely due to the fact that most of my books have been published for the Christmas season, at which it is the custom to spare the rod and spoil the child of the Muses. The critical Cerberus then lies in a placable mood, inspired by beef and pudding, so seldom cares to worry authorkins who at another time might well be suspected of trying to burgle Tartarus or Parnassus. Not to speak of the seasonable spirit of good humour, it seems hardly worth while to spend pains on the mass of well-intended books then offered to the public.

So the Christmas critic usually gets through his task by ringing the changes on stock compliments, with an occasional growl or snap to persuade himself of being wide awake, more rarely a snarl of personal grudge; commonly he takes down the honeyed and half-baked cake at a gulp, as not worth the trouble of chewing, and, blinking lazily, lets the seeker of petty fame pass on unchallenged. Forty years ago a friend

got me to help him out with his job of "reviewing" the Christmas publications of the year for a well-known London paper. My friend made no profession of any familiarity with literature or art, his work being rather on the practical side of journalism, but on some emergency he had been pressed into the critical service. This job had to be done on two afternoons, during which we might turn over some sixty volumes at a noisy office in a Strand, but must take none of them away. It may be supposed what "criticism" was done under these conditions.

I confess, then, to having been a critic myself *à mes heures*, that it may be seen how I judge my fellow-sinners not without such experience as makes an Old Bailey champion a stern judge for so *mæstis reis* as he once defended. For my own conscience, I may say that I have not on my hands the blood or tears of any innocent victim, butchered to make a reviewer's holiday. I have never reviewed a book without reading it, or most of it; and I have always declined to tackle one beyond my scope. I have only once attempted what is called a slashing criticism, inspired by the whim of castigating myself: being sickened by the sugary treatment of books of mine in a periodical that was much under my control, by way of variety I flayed one in the good old savage style, at least to appearance, though I fear the scourge was here plied more noisily than sorely, rather in the manner of Sancho Panza than of Ignatius Loyola. It must often have occurred to authors that, if only for the nonce they could get outside of their own self-complacency and interest, they might write better reviews of their own books than are furnished by the average off-hand notices of the press.

The criticism of our generation works under the



special disadvantage of being in a hurry to serve a public that will not wait a day, hardly an hour, to know what it is to think about any subject. "Indolent reviewers are now lightning reviewers," well says Mr. Frederic Harrison. A day or two before the publication of any book that may be expected to excite general attention, you will see its bulky volumes in the suburban trams, carefully nursed by young gentlemen or ladies who may have a sleepless night or two before them in the effort to present a full, true, and particular account of it in some organ of public opinion, sometimes in more than one organ. What sound criticism is possible in such circumstances, can be imagined. Criticism, indeed, is hardly wanted so much as such a summary of the book as may be made from a hasty turning over of the pages. If not too modest, the reviewer will perhaps hint at picking one or two holes to show how he could be severe if he liked. He is more likely to take the chance of airing any knowledge of the subject he may happen to have. In how many "reviews" is not the *pièce de resistance* some such display of information, loosely tacked on to any available statement of the author! As often, the critic has nothing to show off but his own ignorance. Many years ago an aspirant took me into his confidence as to his first steps in literature, which seem not to have led him far. He had no qualifications except a good opinion of himself and a certain fluency of words, evidently not fed from springs of reading or reflection. Yet somehow, by pushing means, he had got a trial upon a leading London paper. The first job given him, he told me, was to write a column review of the life of a celebrated historic personage then alive; and his only instructions were that this personage must be applauded, accord-

ing to the policy of the paper. So history is made—in newspaper criticism—yet it should be said in fairness that of late years this particular newspaper has gained credit for a more able staff of reviewers.

Some daily papers now find their account in employing well-known authors to write signed reviews and literary articles. The rank and file of journalists, however, not to say of authors, seem extraordinarily ignorant of literature. There is so much to read nowadays that those who would be “up-to-date” find little time for reading anything that does not belong to “actuality ;” and the newspaper critic often betrays amusingly how he has no standard of taste beyond the “best-sellers” of the hour. I can remember how a promising literary review was said to have been killed by laughter over one flagrant blunder it made in an article on a new edition of Johnson’s Dictionary. But now similar blunders are made weekly in the press, without attracting much notice unless a low growl from some secluded reader of the old-fashioned retrospective school, still to be found in country parsonages and other nooks far from the madding crowd. Let me give some recent instances from a weekly periodical that professed to guide literary opinion. A writer in it was severe on a novelist who had brought out a book called *Belinda*, without respect for the same title used by an author still in demand at libraries ; but both critic and author seemed unaware of the existence of a *Belinda* put forth under a name once so well known as Miss Edgeworth’s. About the same time, the same organ made the same oversight as to Miss Burney’s *Cecilia*. I forget if it was this organ or a rival that lent its columns to the bitter complaint of a lady against another novelist stealing a title, *The Silent Woman*, in

which she claimed monopoly ; then all parties had to be informed as to this title having been for three centuries or so registered in a famous name.

These are only a bunch of samples going to suggest how writers and readers of to-day may often be little less ignorant of literature than the type-writing agencies which, when a new edition of some classic was announced, are said to have sent their circulars to *J. Dryden, Esq.*, or — *Petrarch, Esq.*, care of the publishers. The most painful example of such ignorance which has come to my eye was when I once quoted a few lines from a poem by a friend and instructor of my youth—"Phairshon swore a feud against the clan Mac Tavish"—then a Scottish journalist expressed his interest in these unknown lines and inquired who might be the author of them. I should not have thought it possible that any Scot was ignorant of the *Bon Gaultier Ballads* ; but one could easily lay his hand on London journalists who could not recognize an allusion from the *Rejected Addresses* or the poetry of the *Anti-Jacobin*. To be familiar with Virgil, Milton or Gibbon, is of course past praying for ; but one might think a critic hardly qualified who had not at least skimmed our light literature.

In one kind of reading the journalist is like to be well versed, that of his own craft. Night and day he turns over journals and periodicals, so that he has a chance of knowing well what his fellow-craftsmen are saying about a book, and is apt to save himself trouble by joining chorus in growls of abuse or falsetto notes of admiration. The critics, indeed, were always in the way of following each other like a flock of sheep. It is more than ever so, now that they have less time to think for themselves, and not so much outlook on the book world to guide them in taking a line. So,



every season, we see some book hailed as not far from immortal, which in a few months will cease to be asked for at the libraries. Sometimes an author has to pay for such rash applause by a turn of unjust depreciation. When the reputation that has gone up like a rocket comes to fizzle out in the calm starlight, the critics have a trick of avenging their own error by hooting and jeering at the poor celebrity when again he would soar into fame. One remembers the proverbial philosopher whose facile popularity became such a reproach that for a generation to sneer at his very name was the stereotyped commonplace of every criticaster. In this instance, perhaps, the rocket had been winged rather by the popular breath than by critical voices. But in the case of a later poet whose editions were numerous, it was the press that cried him up and afterwards unduly ran him down, despising a merit which might have lain in the middle parts of fortune. Of him it is told how, to a wit that went out in scandalous snuff, he complained of the critics, once so loud in applause, having made a conspiracy of silence against him. "Join the conspirators!" was the sly counsel given him. One can easily recall several "standard authors," Samuel Rogers and W. L. Bowles, for example, who seem now doomed to neglect all the dustier since once they shone too bright in critical favour.

The public has been so often puzzled and misled by its professional guides, that it is no wonder if it does not now care to follow their guidance. We are told that reviews no longer sell a book; it is clear that they cannot prevent it from selling. In its favourite pasture of fiction at least, the many-headed beast shows a disposition to crop at will. More than one of the novelists that have been most successful in our

generation, are a proverb in the mouths of all with any daintiness of taste, have even become a standing jest to the critical chorus in whose teeth their works sell by tons, and the writers find in their bankers' books good excuse for taking themselves seriously, while a *succès d'estime* makes poor comfort to the worthier claimant that has missed the luck of popular favour. From mouth to mouth, from club to club, from tea-table to tea-table, rather than from column to column, swells that wind of fame that fills one sail and leaves another idly flapping after short puffs of appreciating notice. It seems harder to predict our British weather, than to guess from what quarter this prospering breeze will blow, and how long it will hold steady. There are critics, as well as writers, who spend their skill in looking out which way the wind and tide set, so as to follow the drift of public opinion instead of trying to lead it.

In fact the acute critic is well aware how little the public now looks to him to be instructed as to the merits of a work. When he has shown off what he knows of the subject, he casts about to please his readers with any other extraneous consideration that may be treated smartly and spicily. Something about the author himself is the sauce that will best recommend his article to the general taste. Even in the *Spectator's* day, it was slyly noticed how "a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or a choleric disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature." Nowadays the public's itch for peeping into the private life of its favourites has grown a positive nuisance; albeit there are authors who make love to this Paul Prying. The newspaper reviewer knows that he can seldom be

wrong in seasoning his notice with personal talk. At one time, as soon as any book of mine was advertised, I used to receive letters from a gentleman describing himself as the literary editor of a certain London daily, inviting me to furnish him with facts about my private life by way of making straw for his critical bricks, which, as I did not answer these appeals, were not forthcoming in my case.

Sensitive as one may be to such curiosity, there is this much to be said in its favour, that it is seldom ill-natured. Even in journals that frankly avow themselves mainly concerned about personalities, the author or other quasi-celebrity thrown upon its sheet may depend on being presented in the best light, with all the dignity to be looked for in a "Portrait of a Gentleman," and wearing such a pleasant smirk as the photographer tries to catch out of the frowns of self-consciousness. If the subject have stolen his neighbour's wife, if he began life eating peas with his knife, if he drops his hs, or gets drunk every evening, such characteristics will be certainly passed over, and nothing told except to his credit, so kindly is the tone of the British press. I believe it is otherwise in America, where the victim of impertinence will be sometimes flayed alive, especially if he kick against the pricks of the interviewing spy. I was a visitor in that republic when General Grant came to be elected as its President. The opposition papers openly attacked him as a drunkard, while those on his side loudly vouched for him as a teetotaller. I asked James Russell Lowell which of these stories were true, to which he replied with a wink, "Both." Brother Jonathan has still a deplorable relish for personalities in print, as satirized by Artemus Ward. "The new road may or may not be a fraud, as



our contemporary says ; but we haven't got a baldheaded aunt Sal. and a one-eyed sister Sue."

Our press can at least boast this improvement, that spite and slander are much barred from it, both as bad policy and bad form. The critic would hoist himself with his own foul petard, who nowadays bid any rhymers "Back to his gallipots !" Periodicals such as *Blackwood* and the old *Saturday Review* are like Giants Pope and Pagan, that only now and then gnash their teeth in the old style, as by styling a condemned author a "blue-behinded ape." It is not so many years ago, indeed, since I heard a critic say, who wrote stately for one of these organs, that if So-and-So should bring out another book, he, the critic, had an article ready for it that "would take the skin off him." Another story I could recall of two friends who began to write a book together and quarrelled over it, then one of them was allowed to pillory the other in the good old style.

But these are exceptional cases ; and the general tone of our press is as civil as that of priest and non-conformist preacher who controvert each other as if there had never been any question of stakes, racks and thumb-screws in their intercourse. Such attacks as Kenrick's on Goldsmith, or even Macaulay's on Robert Montgomery, would now recoil on their own authors. The reproach of criticism is rather a too easy indulgence. Its ministers appear apt to speak pleasantly of worthless work ; to proclaim monthly masterpieces judged by an ephemeral standard ; and above all to practise the gentle art of log-rolling by giving bold advertisement to their friends and those from whom they themselves expect a turn of laudation. The fashion of signed articles, of course, makes for this weakness, since a writer seldom can afford to be

as independent in his own name as under the mask of some megaphonic "We." As a counsel of perfection, it has been suggested that the critic should sign his opinion of books presented to him with the title page anonymous.

There are dark hints abroad as to the relation between advertising columns and favourable notices. The owner of a much-puffed "proprietary article" put his name lately on a large book, of which a publisher gravely remarked to me, "It is sure to be reviewed well, as he commands so much advertisement." One "enterprising" organ some time ago offered publishers a chance of filling so much space, *moyennant finance*, with their own notices of their publications. But even such trumpet-blowing as can thus be got for love or money does not satisfy the up-to-date publisher of our day. He has started a new device, a sort of advertisement sheet in the form of a private literary periodical, that aims at humbugging the public with puffs of his forthcoming books, embellished with pleasing portraits and tempting personalities to recommend his author. This is but a development of the old *Quarterlies* and *Edinburgh*, that were not ready to speak ill of their allies or good of works brought out by the opposition firm; yet those heavy reviews would have commanded no respect if they had offered one monotony of unblushing puffery under pretence of guidance in literature.

It may be said that, while the petty sessions of literary opinion are open to criticism, I do not show cause to challenge the graver, more considered and better expounded judgment of the Supreme Courts. Has this been always so? Was the *Edinburgh* just to Byron or the *Quarterly* to Keats? Did Jeffrey take

the due measure of Wordsworth or Kit North of Leigh Hunt? Coming nearer our own time, did Froude have fair play at the hands of Freeman? Alas! in all times the paths to the Temple of Fame are seen strewn not only with broken idols and withered laurels, but with rubbish heaps of exaggerated appreciation, malicious censure and miscalculated estimates. But to the credit of our day, I would admit that the higher grades of criticism can show a fairer and sounder standard of judgment than in generations of party bitterness and unashamed personal feuds. These are the few; and I have indeed been speaking rather of the many. It is the rank and file of reviewers who raise the loudest noise of hiss or hurrah; and I doubt if they were ever less worth listening to than now, when they have not time to read half the volumes they review so glibly.

So what is called criticism has fallen into a bad way, tending to become mere puffery, and of little use as a guide to the reader or a school to the writer. For this the public cares little, being more and more disposed to play its own critic, as always it claimed the right to damn or applaud, with or without reason, the piece presented to its favour; and in the long run it will still more securely judge upon the quality "that relegates divine Cowley to that remote, uncivil Pontus of the 'British Poets' and keeps garrulous Pepys within the cheery circle of the evening lamp and fire." Let us ask next, is this plebs of readers any wiser than its professed counsellors?



## X

### READERS

AFTER all, a book's prosperity lies in the eye of him who reads it. Without readers there would be no authors, or none to their own satisfaction. It seems a moot point whether, had Robinson Crusoe possessed the faculty divine and a liberal supply of writing materials, he would have cared to turn a verse on his desert island, at least before educating Man Friday to be an appreciative public. In our island there is no want of a market for books that go all over the world ; but also we writers have so multiplied ourselves, that but few of us can find readers enough for our encouragement. There was not always such a keen competitive examination for public favour ; yet note how even the best of us has always been fain to coax and flatter his patrons as "friendly reader," "indulgent reader," or with the like compliments from their humble servant. The shop-walker does not put on more winning airs of politeness to customers, nor does the doctor depend more on a genial bedside manner.

Then comes the question, are there any real readers nowadays, or any worth having ? Some unpopular authors allege the true breed to be extinct in a generation of mere skimmers. What no one can deny is

the multitude of turners-over of pages which else would hardly be worth printing. In the year 1910, not to come too close to the passing hour,<sup>1</sup> there were published in Britain a matter of nearly 8,500 books, of which between a fourth and a fifth dealt with fiction, and on the whole had the largest clientèle of attention. There was a slight decrease in the output of novels, and a slight increase in religious and scientific works, also in mushroom political publications forced by the temperature of parliamentary hot-beds; and strange to say, the supply of poetry had risen by 20 per cent. One doubts if this indicates a corresponding rise in the demand: two friends of mine who lately brought out volumes of verse report their sales as respectively a dozen and a dozen and half copies, to which may be added some scores "presented by the author." With the poor poets' readers by the dozen, may be set the popular novelists' hundreds, thousands and myriads, the companies of examinees who have to read text-books, and the groups of mild martyrs who on Sundays think it a merit to nod over sermons; then, on the average, each author of sorts has a certain following that makes up a host of readers more or less attentive. But when one comes to examine into the quality of the matter read, one suspects that of being inferior to the quantity. And if statistics were available, it might prove that most of our noble army of readers confine their studies mainly to the journal or other periodical rival of the book, which may now get its best chance of fame in a newspaper summary.

The schoolmaster, for the last generation or two, has been busy turning out by the million scholars

<sup>1</sup> In 1913 the tale had increased to over 12,000.

who have learned to read without much knowledge of what is worth reading. Such a public has its tastes, which are not those of the bookworm reared on dusty classics. The magic of language leaves it cold ; true wit and humour are caviare to it ; it skips the charm of style and yawns at the dignity of learning ; the glare of the limelight and the blare of the gramophone are its ideals of art ; it needs pictures and advertisements, the more blatant the better, to attract its curiosity. Its curiosity is much for mean things. The sight of Proteus coming from the sea would not draw it like that of any lion of the hour ; the Venus of Milo or of Medici seem lay figures beside the ripe and real beauties disclosed by the more or less deficient drapery of the dancer in vogue ; the great tragedies of pity and terror have no interest for those whose eyes light up for any peep at the murderer or swindler of the day, if only in a newspaper biograph ; and, can such a celebrity's name be kept green till he gets out of jail, he is sure of a sale for a shameless volume in which he may describe his moving experience. In short, it pays well to put into print a mass of ephemeral matter which bears the same relation to literature as Madame Tussaud's exhibition does to the Elgin marbles. It is not difficult to mould such matter ; but its titling, its dressing-up and its puffing call for an editorial talent skilled to discriminate between the Laocoon and the newest addition to the Chamber of Horrors. In the workshops of this new trade, the sweated author has a miserable life of it, where large fortunes have been made in our time by employers with no other merit than that of being able to exploit ignorance and vulgarity. So in our generation flourishes a garden of weeds to choke the flowers of literature.



Of course it is an old story, this quarrelling with the taste of one's age.

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope ;  
Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey.

In other arts it is not otherwise. Browning opined of Verdi how,

While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang  
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,  
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths,  
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

But I am creditably informed that by musicians of our day Verdi rather might be conceived to sit patient and Rossini to have the grace of modest doubt as to his superiority. Verdi, to be sure, had an earlier and a later manner, which a little dashes this estimate. And one is aware of melomaniacs who now stop their ears against that Teuton trumpet that thrilled the last generation, even a reluctant Frenchman being fain to confess it "not so bad as it sounds:" what was to be the music of the future tends already to become a matter of the past.

Taste is bound to change by the very law of rhythm : a spell of noisy sound raises a desire for softer melodies ; a generation that has indulged in too much heady sentimentalism, turns thirstily to the soda-water of realism ; and when we have grown sick of analysing motives and studying unpleasant problems by way of amusement, there is a natural reaction towards the simpler gust of romance. One hesitates, then, to offer one's own preferences as rule and meaurement for an architecture that must provide cottages and barns as well as palaces and temples. But, taking our authors all round and applying to them the standard set by acknowledged masters of the world's mind, I can't

feel so confident as Grant Allen was in proposing the toast of "Our noble selves." To me it seems as if many of those that best tickle our public's long ear, do so by art that wants either classical grace or romantic charm. Strain and affectation replace strength and dignity. In their eagerness to call attention to themselves among the press of candidates for favour, some writers turn their hustings into a mountebank stage on which to play impudent tricks that may succeed in drawing curious gapers. They cannot show a plain story acted in broad daylight, but depend on rouge and tawdry bedizenment, confuse one's attention with blue lights and rockets, and accentuate their wordy patter with the creak of the barrel organ and the thump of the big drum. Those that try for high notes are apt to go off into falsetto breaking down as a hoarse growl. Those that would be funny twist themselves in contortions to make the judicious spectator grieve. Those that would be dull, do that quite naturally; and there is always a demand for dullness. Thackeray has pointed out how there are many worthy people who resent anything like an appeal to imagination or humour; and they also need not look far about for mental pasture in a generation that cultivates all sorts of talent, unless the rarest.

A friend of mine who is an Examiner for a great University, tells me how in a paper set to thousands of young men and maidens all over the country, he lately put the question: Who were the three greatest living English authors? Swinburne and Meredith being then alive. The votes of this constituency were overwhelmingly cast for two novelists of large circulation; about the third place, there was more difference of opinion, but a majority went to another popular story-teller. I am not going to wound the modesty of these authors

by mentioning their names, easily guessable by whoever studies the book market ; but I venture to give my opinion that half a century hence none of the three names will be a household word any more than is that of G. P. R. James, of Eugène Sue or of Carl Gutzkow to-day. With more or less merit, they have caught the taste of their time ; but to label them its greatest writers is a self-published libel on their eager readers.

Old fogeys like me when we play the *laudator temporis acti* are snubbed by smart scribes of the period with the disparaging epithet of Early Victorian. I, for one, should like to appeal against their verdicts to posterity, that in the long run judges securely on the merit of human achievement. One cannot imagine that any large body of Victorian students, however callow, would not have given that place of honour to Tennyson, Thackeray and Dickens, for which last name a respectable minority might have substituted George Eliot ; and all these stars, I venture to predict, will be shining in the firmament long after the largest circulations of our day have become nebulous memories. Should my pages hold together so long, they may prompt some up-to-date reader, forty years on, to say how the Early Victorian age compares in his eyes with one that affects such a poor opinion of its predecessor.

In pleading the cause of neglected talent, one is too easily led into abusing the character of witnesses on the other side. It should be owned that, while some of our most boomed writers seem unworthy of their many editions, the general standard has risen ; and if our generation is no Augustan age of literature, it has a greater number than ever of good novelists, essayists, poets, and urbane humorists crowding one another out of conspicuous notice. The company



officers seem more fit for their work ; it is in Wellingtons and Marlboroughs that we fall short. One strong point of our literature seems to be in careful and kindly studies of aspects of homespun life, too much neglected of old by writers who chose rather to draw from heroic models. Even those novelists who find their account in presenting duchesses, bishops, bold bad baronets and the like have to present them as men and women, sometimes with their humanity rather exaggerated in contrast to their position. In a word, the realism of our time is, as becomes it, more widely sympathetic and more subtly observant than the imaginative romanticism it supplanted.

A less pleasing symptom is the public relish for incidents of biography that might as well be left in Time's dust-bin. "The man with the muck-rake" is too welcome to our circulating-library public, for whom he scents the garbage of the past by arts that make it none the more wholesome. But as the Elizabethan age is distinguished for its dramas and that of Queen Anne for its essayists, so our period will be best represented by the flood of novels that from week to week flush its broad and shallow channels of literature. Theology, history, philosophy, philanthropy, politics, science, scandal, must all be conveyed in the medium of fiction for readers who pout at their powders unless sweetened by such jam. One thinks with pity of the labour of future Macaulays who may have to gather the social characteristics of our day, not from some single *Petronius Arbiter* or *Decameron*, some *Simplissimus* or *Gil Blas*, some *Roman Bourgeois* or other early realistic novel, *rari nantes* among the wrecks of time, but from thousands, perhaps myriads, of such more or less contradictory "documents" as can pass on to posterity in a sixpenny edition.

Again, the charge of inferior taste may be met by the fact that nothing sells better in our book market than cheap editions of standard works, libraries of the "Hundred Best Authors" and the like, not to speak of various popular series that undertake to give the cream of such books, along with criticism and biography aimed at rousing or guiding the reader to intelligent interest in them and their authors. But one doubts if classic volumes be not more bought than read, as by that millionaire who, when ordering sets of Shakespeare and Milton, desired to be regularly supplied with their new works as published. One knows of some keen book collectors that seem to read little beyond title pages and catalogues; indeed, I could name a worthy householder who has a good show of books, accumulated at sales, and he would not be aware of my putting him in print, for he cannot read, not even since he served with credit on the School Board of his neighbourhood.

At least, it will be hoped, such accepted models are much in the hands of living authors, who, if the worst come to the worst, might be expected to read one another's books with due consideration. There is indeed, as already hinted, a whole gang of writers, busy in our generation, whose talent is for commenting on, annotating, and illustrating the works of their predecessors, somewhat helping the mass of readers to neglect the great authors themselves for the easier task of reading what has been written about them. The majority of our instructors, one fears, show little sign of having given much time to solid reading. But even were it not so, one guesses how the giants of old would rather have their names in the hearts of the many than in the heads of the few. Authors know from themselves how apt they are to make bad readers,

impatient, supercilious and with too clear an eye for the seamy side of the work. The very fact of having often to read in the way of business blunts their wholesome appetite for books, as cooks are said to worship Bacchus rather than Ceres. In a life now closing on to three score and ten, I must have had to read hundreds of thousands of books, sometimes a dozen or so a day, if only on the hunt for a reference or a quotation; and I own to bouts of sickness in so much cramming with print. On this experience, I have long made a rule of reading every Sunday morning some good book, carefully, reverently and without an eye to my own work of the moment. I am not going to confess the names of my Sunday books, that are sometimes the approved books of one's childhood, but may now be varied by a more Catholic selection to fit the mood of the moment or the season: perhaps a sermon by Jeremy Taylor or S. T. Coleridge; perhaps a portion waled from the works of one who could not be sure whether his lines would turn out a song or a sermon; perhaps a Scene from Clerical Life; perhaps one from Auerbach's Cellar; perhaps a comedy of Molière, or a canto from a less human Comedy which I have heard a good lady find fault with as treating solemn matters in an unscriptural manner; but she charitably concluded that after all it could not do so much harm, as written in Italian. Among such censors there were upbraidings in my youth when a periodical called *Good Words* insinuated novels into the course of Sunday reading; but one learns to take no book as common or unclean for its form, nay, to find more edification in some songs and parables than in the driest and dustiest tomes of orthodox divinity.

Such leisurely Sunday morning study is the sort



of reading an author would like to make sure of, or of a place in that company of bed-side books which devout readers laud and magnify, each after his kind. After all, the best readers may be found among the laity, or those who never write anything beyond a casual paper for a mutually improving circle. Cause can be shown to suspect writers by profession of being bad readers. Did not Dr. Johnson let out that he never read a book through? Yet, indeed, he is reported by Bishop Percy as performing that feat for *Felixmarte of Hyrcania*, a folio few readers of to-day would care to tackle. Charles Lamb, for all his poring over old folios, was suspiciously given to misquoting his favourite authors, including some that nobody else much cared to read. His friend Hazlitt confessed that he found reading more of a task than an enjoyment. Landor in his old age professed to wish that he had wasted less time on books. Dickens was said to read no books but his own, though in youth he had evidently studied his predecessors in fiction. Carlyle has written very forcibly about Dante; but some of his allusions seem to show that he had not read attentively beyond his brother's translation of the *Inferno*. Spenser has been called the poet of poets; but one wonders how many of our esteemed bards can count themselves among those fit and few readers "in at the death of the Blatant Beast." Macaulay himself, by the way, ardent and tenacious reader as he was, seems for once at fault here, as if flagging on this labyrinthine hunt, for in fact Time threw a dart at Spenser before that quarry had been run down to the music of his verse.

There are cases to the contrary, like Pliny the Elder who, while writing some hundred books and more numerous volumes of extracts, spent every

spare minute in reading or being read to : while in his bath, his nephew tells us, he let eye and ear be idle for a few minutes, but was rubbed dry to the accompaniment of lection or dictation. Many a modern scholar might be named as a very *helluo librorum*, and as subscribing to Pliny's dictum that a wise reader could get some good out of the worst book. But of one pundit in our own time, who was also editor of the *Times*, it was said that he kept only three books at home : I forget what they were, one being in Arabic. I once knew a veteran whose reading was confined to the *Army List*, and that he knew by heart. Mr. Soapy Sponge's studies, if one remember right, were much restricted to Moggs' Cab Fares : knowledge of the *Stud Book* may have come to him by nature. Readers might be all the better off for having few books at hand, the profit of reading being not so much in what we read but in how we read. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested," as Bacon puts it, who also tells us that "reading makes a full man," without observing how the mind as well as the body may be puffed out by wind.

The strictest test to which authorial merit could be put appears in that old question : if one were cast on a desert island with a choice of only three books, which should they be ? The Bible and Shakespeare usually figure in most discreet answers to this question ; but the third choice will be a wide one ; certain grovelling souls have been understood to suggest a cookery-book. It may have been an undergraduate who voted for Plato because there was no getting to the end of him. For a lengthy marooning, one might do worse than choose the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Ersch and Gruber's *Allgemeine Encyclopädie*,

or the new *Oxford Dictionary*, a class of work recommended by one of Alexander Selkirk's countrymen as having "nae monotony aboot it." A millionaire castaway might wile old Father Time by equipping himself with a great Chinese Encyclopædia, of which the British Museum copy, which cost £2,000, is bound in 745 thick volumes, containing 800,000 pages, each of nine columns. Few western readers would live to win through this seventeenth century compilation, three or four times as large as our greatest Encyclopædia.

Familiarity with books has been for our age much furthered by public libraries, open to the most penniless student, at which gratis fountains of knowledge, one understands, there is a brisker flow for volumes of low specific gravity than for such viscous matter as Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* or Masson's *Life of Milton*. Circulating Libraries also offer their merry-go-round amusement in our Vanity Fair. I hear of readers who, on economic and sanitary principles, decline to keep books in their houses, depending on the mental dust-collectors who will call weekly at their door, while others distrust library books as disseminating germs of infection, a charge that seems disproved by the experience of librarians and their assistants. Most readers nowadays get the mass of their reading from such common sources ; yet the best readers may agree rather with that "Poet at the Breakfast Table" who, in setting forth a good model for a well-chosen library, let us know "when I want a book, it is as a tiger wants a sheep," so he did not care to take baffling chances on the shelves of a public institution. Most lovers of any book would choose to have it always at reach, in the raggedest and smokiest of coats, "a poor thing but mine own," whose pages one can



deface with pencil marks or tobacco ash, and fear not to be called to account. Your greedy reader is apt to be a bit of a sloven, who in dressing-gown and slippers hardly cares to take in hand the sumptuously bound or handsomely illustrated editions that look so well behind glass. Some of my dearest books were picked up on a stall for a few halfpence; and some I have that ought to sell for pounds were they not disfigured by annotations I have made on them, of no use except to the owner. Congenial spirits will not blame those scorings and scribblings, with which one can record one's appreciation in cabalistic smudges which the author would welcome as adornments, could he see them. It has been said that a man's character may be known from his library, but better, in truth, from the parts of his library that bear signs of most use, sometimes to the surprise of those who come to possess it after him. I knew once a genial and urbane poet, who bore an unblemished name in the best society; but when he died, his executors thought well to burn the most costly of his collections, a fact not touched on in his official biography.

If authors' ghosts revisit the glimpses of the moon, be sure they do not haunt chill and dank churchyards among vulgar spooks, but flit softly into the nearest snug library, peering eagerly upon the shelves for familiar titles, without which, in their view, no library would be complete. How their lack-lustre eyes must sparkle with the reflection of gilt lettering on the backs of a tall and well-tooled copy of the book of books that may have come into the world so naked and with such pains as the author remembers! But then how the gleam of ghostly light will fade out if the shade find his well-clad volume shrouded in dust and cobwebs, as may be its chance, after a half-forgetful

century. Rather would he see that child of his brain tattered, torn and dogs'-eared almost to destruction than treasured in honour, perhaps under lock and key, to be touched only at due intervals by mercenary brooms and dusters. It might as well be one of those mock books, such dummy volumes as were lettered at Chatsworth by the wit of Thomas Hood—*Dirge on the Death of Wolfe by Lamb*—*Boyle on Steam*—*Cursory Remarks on Swearing*—and so on through a string of merry quips.

Having for forty years or so rummaged the shelves of our largest subscription library, I have often had the surprise of coming on some lauded book with no signs of having been even skimmed: for example, the other day I took out the second part of *Faust* and found its pages uncut by a generation of English readers. But Goethe's stately ghost need not complain, when the translators of the first part alone make up a quite flattering public. It is living authors who may have cause to shudder when for decency's sake they are fain to cut the pages of their own book, which more than once I have noted as in need of such attention. I myself never stumbled on that humiliating personal experience,—to be obviated, indeed, by the bookbinder—yet on another hardly less so. I once wrote a serious volume dealing carefully with a certain episode in history, which I was lately dismayed to find keeping loose company in the department of the said library devoted to *Fiction*, that by the way includes such flights of fancy as Borrow's *Bible in Spain*.

For all the sins an author may have done in lifetime, can there be a more bitter penance than spiritually to follow a flesh and blood reader along these shelves, jogging his elbow with inane touch as he

halts opposite the poor ghost's dark corner of fame, then heaving an unheeded sigh as he passes on to consider the titles of a hated or despised rival, now in the alphabetical irony of fate ranked beside his own, *Rabelais* perhaps beside *Rasselas*, or Samuel Johnson beside the Sire de Joinville, Lamb cheek by jowl with Lamartine, James and Robert Montgomery squeezed together like *Hudibras* and *Erewhon*, Matthew Arnold edging himself away from the *Light of Asia*, Samuel Smiles ill-neighbourd by Horace Smith, Herbert Spencer by Edmund Spenser, Tupper sandwiched between Tolstoi and Turgenev, Miss Yonge purring in the ear of some ribald Yorick, Zola rubbing up against Zoroaster, John Knox fain to hobnob with Paul de Koch on the one side and J. S. Knowles on the other, while Bulwer-Lytton has a choice of uncongenial company between his wife and John Bunce, as Freeman and Froude, unlovely and unpleasant to each other in life, are but little divided in death.

And even were the dead author able to see his works still in the hands of posterity, as well as on its bookshelves, it might be a drawback to his satisfaction to find the lamplight of fame falling less often on the pages through which he best hoped to live. Milton thought more of *Paradise Regained* than of *Paradise Lost*, but how many of his votaries turn by choice to that shrine? To Johnson's shade all the world must seem vile Whigs for being less interested in his *Rasselas* and *Rambler* than in the table talk reported of him by a pitiful North Briton. Does Southey care to be better known by his *Life of Nelson* than by the epics in which he vainly proclaimed—



I am a blessed Glendoveer :

'Tis mine to speak and yours to hear !

What does Wordsworth think of the skipping pace at which we follow his *Excursion* ? Does Dickens relish our broad grins over *Pickwick* when he catches us yawning at the death-beds of Paul Dombey and Little Nell ? Are Cicero and Cæsar content to have their poems buried beneath their prose, immortal in schools and colleges ?

These spirits may see matters in another light, now that they have long joined the silent majority. On earth, too, there is a choir invisible that sooner or later decides which writers, and what works of theirs are to be more enduring than brass, or to tinkle only like cymbals. This choir follows the example set in churches and chapels, where breath would fail us to sing through our hymn book, even to render the whole of the hundredth and nineteenth psalm at one standing or sitting. Under the leadership of some priest or precentor, if not at our own prompting, we learn to "wale a portion with judicious care." To the congregation of posterity is given out, Let us read to the praise and glory of God the first two volumes of *The Mill on the Floss* ; or *The Vicar of Wakefield*, omitting the last seven chapters ; or the Roger de Coverley and the Uncle Toby selections from the *Spectator* and *Tristram Shandy* respectively. And all famous writers have familiar passages that serve for texts and illustrations to the preachers or teachers of future generations. Homer's "much-sounding ocean," Virgil's "easy descent to Avernus," Dante's "let us look and pass," Shakespeare's "dyer's hand," Milton's "autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa," Wordsworth's "Not too bright and good,"

Longfellow's "footsteps on the sands of time" go current like well-worn coin among those who seldom peep into any mint of such phrases. Some authors seem lucky in putting into circulation a large number of such counters—Shakespeare himself, Pope, Dickens, Tennyson, and Browning in his own province. Many of their phrases are so trite as often to be misquoted, like "fresh *fields* and pastures new," and "the *even* tenour of their way," or misapplied like *Par nobile fratrum*, or mistaken like Frankenstein for his monster, *errata* that must vex a careful poet's shade; yet surely he would rather be ill-remembered than forgotten. Of one conscientious short-hand writer, indeed, it is told how he ended his report of a speech: "in conclusion, the honourable gentleman ventured to maintain that in his opinion it was only noble to be good, that, in fact, kind hearts were more valuable than coronets, and simple faith to be depended upon rather than Norman blood."

My own ghost will not at once need to complain of neglect, if it may have to go without affectionate regard. I have written a score or so of volumes on which dogs'-ears may gather but not cobwebs, school books to wit, that go all over one empire on which the sun never sets, and another that would like to have a good stretch in the sun. One of them was reported to me not long ago as reprinted at a Dutch town of which I had never before heard tell; another as casting a shadow over juvenile minds as far off as Buenos Ayres. I am sure of my readers, by myriads, by millions from first to last. Like the French Minister of Education, I can take out my watch and declare that at a given moment certain fractions of the human race are reading my lessons: in this calculation, indeed, it may be necessary to neglect

difference of latitude and the incidence of Antipodean holidays. Sooner or later they have to read me, and with attention ; and so I serve them out for neglect of my stories in their hours of ease. My pages are wet with tears and stained by dusky thumb marks. No skimming is allowed in this case : for a whole term, or terms, the volume must remain painfully familiar. It seems as well for one's name not to stand on those title pages : let the publishers rather present themselves to juvenile execration, and for once an author can be content to blush unseen.

To such manuals I could play the critic as lief as the author. In the school books of this generation, the great point is to make everything plain to the meanest capacity concerned. Science, grammar, useful knowledge of all sorts, must be administered in the form of pap or patent food peptonized for mental digestions hitherto supplied with a proportion of fibrous or stodgy matter, as is the way of nature. I am not sure but that this cockering of the young idea be not at the bottom of some disrelish for sound literature in after life, into which will be carried the taste for having everything made easy and pleasant. I am quite sure as to the heresy that the benefit of reading depends on understanding. When nature's healthy nursling can stomach a raw turnip or cocoanut on occasion, need we trouble so much to tickle his appetite with artfully cooked messes ?

I appeal to all true lovers of books, whether they did not begin young, and whether they did not try their teeth on all sorts of fare, settling by choice on the sweets that are wholesome at that stage of growth. Perhaps they had Bridget Elia's luck, who was "tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much



selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage." Surely it never occurred to them to throw away a book because they did not fully comprehend it. The very delight of reading was opening vistas into the unknown, shadowy avenues of wonder and dread, dewy pathways of dim romance, chequered by rising fancy's sunlight and fairy moonshine, where one lost oneself in daydreams such as will never come under a noon-tide glare of knowledge. Did we ask a schoolmaster to make our visions plain by the light of common day ?

I, for one, learned to read early with so little pains that I cannot recall them. The first book I can remember reading with engrossing enjoyment was given me, if I err not, on my fifth birthday. I forget the title of it and all of its contents except that it dealt with some children going into the country to be treated with a syllabub. I did not know what a syllabub was then ; I am not sure that I know now ; but the word conveyed to me some vaguely refreshing charm, "tasting of Flora and the country green," calling up to my mind's eye a field spangled with daisies and buttercups and to the ear that cheerful lowing of cows on their way to pasture that was my nursery *reveille*. There was another most entrancing tale which, at a country house now degraded into a railway goods station, I opened to relieve the tedium of my elders' conversation, and read on with deep absorption till the end of the call forced me to leave it half-told at a most thrilling point, where a tricky midshipman poked a broom into the stern first-lieutenant's face. This must have been a story of sea-life that so interested me when I had never seen a ship and could hardly have known what

a midshipman was or a lieutenant; yet from it I date my first crude appreciation of the comic, unless before that came the more rudimentary fun of Jack the Giant Killer's setting old Fee-Fo-Fum to rip himself up by tricks with hasty pudding: what hasty pudding was I knew not, but I could none the less relish the humorous justice of any device to quell such a big, barbarous monster who deserved the worst that could be done with him. I suppose that rather coarse episode will be edited out of contemporary histories of Jack; but indeed I am informed of the "new child" as not much caring for such good old stories, if which be true, I am sorry for him, and suspect unwise elders of having sophisticated his natural appetite.

My first impression of poetic power is associated with the hymn "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning," learned by heart when I could not have been able to analyse its sense any more than to parse its grammar. Its tune is still my high-water mark of musical appreciation: on my telling an eminent musician that I liked one of *The Songs without Words*, he at once strummed it on the piano, and to my inquiry how he had guessed which was my favourite, drily remarked, "That's the one people always do like who know nothing about music!" One of my most inspiring early studies was an odd volume of some Railway Magazine, which sounds like heavily prosaic reading, but such titles as "Great Western" and "London and South-Western" carried my imagination as far as Mesopotamia. The name of "Nine Elms" Station made a recurring spot of light in this dark jungle. The accounts of railway accidents offered thrilling tragedies. What never failed to stir my wonder was the mysterious word

“deodand.” How many grown-up persons, school-book editors even, can unriddle me that hoary word that satisfied my childish mind with a vague sense of something solemnly impressive. Such was the experience of a short-sighted nursling at the Muses’ apron-string. Yet I am not sure but that those harder reared callants were more to be envied who had fewer books to know well-nigh by heart, and instead of being much allowed to blind themselves over printed pages spelt out by peat-fires, ran bare-foot and open-eyed on heathery braes and bush banks, schooled by storm and sunshine in the lore of nature, till the kindly gloaming brought them home to be sung to sleep by tales

“of old forgotten things,  
And battles long ago.”

Such stories are never forgotten, like so much of what we take in by our spectacles.

To the less artfully schooled generation of young scholars in which I came to run the gauntlet of grammar and exercises, the letters of the alphabet were keys to a wonderland that seems shut to many youngsters now. We had not so many books to read, but we read them better; and some of our books were the best. We read not only *Evenings at Home*, *Sandford and Merton* and the juvenile libraries celebrating such heroes as *Tom Thumb*, but also with gusto *Don Quixote*, *The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Scott’s novels, nay his poems.

To thee, dear schoolboy, whom my lay  
Has cheated of his hour of play,

appealed that Wizard of the North, not in vain, when an idle Grecian might be seen poring over a translation



of Homer, which perhaps he could ill construe in the original.

How many schoolboys now have time or taste for reading poetry ? How few could pass an examination in those classics of our youth. I came across one the other day who had undergone several examinations in English and foreign literature, without becoming aware of such classical opuscles as *Hohenlinden* and *The Burial of Sir John Moore*. Our clever schoolboys smile or yawn when they read in *Tom Brown* how Arthur's voice broke over Helen's lament for the chivalrous Hector ; and they have nothing but incredulous scorn for the habit of poetical quotation attributed to Farrar's heroes. It takes an absorbing study of cricket averages or football records to cheat them of their playtime. What literature they read is a pemmican specially prepared for them after approved recipes. The seasoning and serving up of it is no matter of indifference, since, as Emerson says, a boy is what the pit is in the playhouse, the most independent if not the most fastidious of critics. Yet writing of the kind makes easy work, once you get your hand in at it. Your youngster brings to his book a contributory imagination that colours for himself the plainest of pictures. He is content with the most stiff-jointed *mannequin* of a hero, so long as its feats be excitedly impossible enough ; and the rudest Guy Fawkes serves for a villain to be helplessly knocked about and squashed like the policeman in the pantomime : his relish for humour, too, is in the elementary stage of clown's pranks upon pantaloons. The dashing writer in this sort appeals to a fancy that comes half-way to meet him. He has only to label his dummy " A bold boy "—British, Yankee, or French, as the case may be—and the sympathy of the reader fills up the barest

outline, not missing lights and shades from a picture of action. Style is unnecessary ; moral tone is even a blemish, so long as he teach his patrons to hick and to hack, which, as Dame Quickly understood, they learn fast enough of themselves ; and he must bring his hero through all hazards, to due admiration, without turning a hair. Girls, of course, require another model for their heroine ; but in this generation of Amazons, they are said to take very kindly to boys' books as well as to the more sentimental stories that command their natural interest. While fiction for their elders, as Herbert Spencer can point out, is more based upon an analysis of heterogeneous motive, has been growing more subtle, more reflective, more widely sympathetic, the juvenile reader still loves strong contrasts of black and white, and has an eye for only the primary colours of human nature.

It is not for me to be too contemptuous of a chromolithographic and photographic form of art fated to fall to pieces in the hands of hasty readers. Yet I can't but regret that an abundant supply of these ephemera too much takes off the eyes of our youth from nobler pictures and severer sculpture, familiarity with which should be an abiding habit. There are two tests of a good book, one written for amusement, that is to say, the only kind most young readers read with good will. The first is, does it amuse, does it keep one sitting up when one ought to be in bed ? That test, the books in question may pass with honours. To speak of deafening its votary to the dinner bell might sound a counsel of perfection. Then comes the further criterion, will it bear reading again ? I trow not, in the case of most juvenile literature. Ask a boy about one of his Christmas gift books, and he tells you as of the snows of yester-year, " Oh ! I have read that already."

Does he ever read it twice ? Can he skim it without a yawn when a lustrum or so has ripened his judgment ?

It is not thus that the true lover of books reads the *Iliad*—the *Divine Comedy*—the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare or Milton—the *Vicar of Wakefield*—the *Essays* of Elia—the *Newcomes*—books that are for every age and for all time, since each reading brings out more clearly the author's power, or but freshens our relish for the best in its kind. It was not thus that some of us read *Don Quixote*, missing perhaps at first its ironical purpose, yet dimly seeing more in it than the string of farcical mishaps it presents to grosser natures, and in after life to catch its meaning with an enjoyment the keener for blurred recollections.

But the soft literary pap with which children are now fed hardly strengthens them to pick for themselves, fastening by instinct, like squirrels, upon such nuts as they can crack, and perhaps relishing the kernel of the matter, before all its flowers and foliage can be brought into the mental lens. Here is the true reader, he who will justify Cicero's commonplace as to books being our best friends, congenial alike in youth and age, the ornament of prosperity, the refuge and consolation of adversity, the delight of the fireside, nor otherwise out of doors, spending the night with us, always available as travelling companions, as welcome in the country as in town. As for less promising tyros, they must read if only by and by to study price lists and advertisements ; yet they might often be better employed than in reading what is fit to be forgotten.

It is interesting to compare the juvenile literature of our day with that of a century ago, the latter so much more scanty, also notoriously more edifying. Perhaps I am no fair critic of such old favourites as *Sandford and Merton* and *Evenings at Home* ; but I can't help



regretting the neglect into which the like of them have fallen ; and I suspect the young old Adam of being too spicily catered for in the showy prize books of this generation. I speak of Master John Bull and Uncle Sam's children, if the latter have any childhood to speak of. Other nations, among which priestly censorship was longer in esteem, show less progress in this respect. In Italy, for instance, where such moral and instructive works as *Giannettino* still hold their field, the most successful book for the young published in our time, to sell by hundreds of editions, is E. De Amicis' *Cuore*, tales informed by such high-flown sentiment and faith in patriotism that beside it our religious fiction would seem humorous and realistic. This book, besides becoming a household word in its own country, has been translated with acceptance into French and Spanish ; but an English version of it seems to have gained little favour. Under Mr. Squeers' rule youngsters had to begin with stickjaw, which might or might not be an introduction to more dainty fare ; while in carefully regulated nurseries sweets were permitted only in strict moderation, if not barred out by austere elders. We have changed all that for the other extreme, our young readers being encouraged to pick and choose their mental diet among the pastry and confectionery of literature,—out of school hours, that is to say, yet even lessons have to be cunningly flavoured and seasoned, no longer with such sharp or hot condiments as brought tears into the eyes and blisters upon the skin.

The habit of easy reading follows young people into after life, when they find themselves unable or unwilling to digest the solid meals of literature. Then the pictures with which these books of theirs must be leavened go to demoralize an appetite keen only for

kickshaws. The present generation seems childish in its love of pretty pictures as well as smooth pages. A classic must be recommended to us by clever illustrations reproduced on clayed paper that will perish in half a century or so. The periodicals that flourish most rankly in our literary garden raise their heads in a flowery show of reproductive processes ; while one by one have withered away the sober magazines planted in our father's day. Even the newspaper has to adorn itself with blotched scenes and portraits of due actuality. The very dictionary or cyclopædia is furnished with cuts. History is taught in pageants to grown-up audiences, who are brought eye to eye with the events of the day in cinematograph panoramas. There appears indeed to be no small demand for illustrated editions of religion, else not so much appealing to a generation that in some ways seems less thoughtful than its forefathers, yet with so much more to think about.

I should like to say more on this subject ; but I am loth to trust my own judgment about a class of books I myself have written without success. I can see reasons why young readers prefer to mine certain volumes which do not please me. I have taken trouble in mixing black and white into shades of grey, which are lost on the colour sense of undeveloped minds, nor is my vein of humour obvious enough to their sympathy. Then again certain stories of mine have the weak point of being too much in the passive voice ; my interest being in character as developed by outward circumstances, under the conditions of real life. But your boy, however it may be with girls, loves his heroes to be much in the active, performing the most gallant feats without much regard to probability or even possibility. The youth of the world loves

champions like Achilles and Ajax, bound to come off safe against any earthly odds, and ready to defy even the immortals. Critics of simple grain find the "piety" of Æneas bordering on what they might call priggishness, and the *lachrymæ rerum* are apt to be a jest till human nature develops finer feelings perhaps at the expense of some robustness of temper.

So much of hint as to a private disappointment, for I am not ashamed to confess here that it is in this despised province of literature I have tried hardest to succeed. I may at least take myself to be its *doyen*, having, so far as I know, survived all who practised in it when I began to follow their traces, and some who, starting later on the same course, outstripped me while picking up more golden apples than fell in my way. Were the prize but a wreath of wild olive I should not regret the dust and sweat of the contest. Let me write the books of the young, and who will might make sermons, laws and leading articles. Yet, all the same, I would rather see a youngster of mine growing familiar betimes with authors who may be his guides, philosophers, and friends till he come to close the volume of life.

Youngsters, when they do take to reading, are readers worth having, whose favour the most exalted author should not despise. The greatest compliment I ever had paid me was by a boy, now I believe rising in the world as no frivolous member of parliament, who probably is not aware how we once met without making one another's acquaintance. It was on a Sunday afternoon at a house in the country, where for co-inmates we had several cultured damsels of the then novel Girton type. They brought into the drawing-room their Brownings, their Ruskins, their Ibsens and such-like, whereon they would pore for a



few minutes, then break off to gossip or meditate ; there was even a gentle spirit of slumber abroad that warm afternoon. I happened to be writing letters at a table where the one boy of the company sat reading steadily, for hours, never moving but to turn page after page. He was spoken to but did not answer ; he was summoned to tea but sat fast ; he took no notice of me who once had the curiosity to glance across the table at the book that so engrossed him, but its title told me nothing. I thought to myself how I should like to see one of my stories read with such devotion. But when the reader had at last been torn away by force, to bed, to supper, or other claim of domestic discipline, I presently took up the abandoned volume, and lo ! it proved to be my own handiwork, the name of which I had for a moment forgotten, as may seem incredible to the present reader, informed of authorial vanity—"The mother may forget the child," etc. But the plain truth is that I have in my possession a tiny volume as to which I am not now quite sure whether I did or did not write it more than forty years ago. Is it not on record that Scott, in his old age, took some of his own lines for Byron's, and that he had become entirely oblivious of his authorship in the *Bride of Lammermoor* !

The most neglected author may be supposed to have one faithful reader, himself. But I am not sure if this always holds good. It is said about certain authors that they seem never to read anything but their own books ; and others, like Biles Gridley M.A., appear never tired of fondly perusing the features of some single bantling loved all the more for want of general appreciation. But a writer of many books may be like the mother-bird that hatches her eggs with unflinching care and nurses her callow brood with anxious love

presently to forget them when they have flown into the world. I wonder if my own case be singular : after working over a volume a score of times in manuscript and in proof, it is long before I can face the drudgery of going through it again. Like David, while the child's fate was still in doubt, I fasted and wept over it ; but when it is once confined in boards, I wash and anoint myself and sit down to meat without more ado. Years afterwards, when its once too trite pages have grown blank in my memory, I may turn to it perhaps with fresh zest, perhaps with candid criticism, perhaps with honest shame for the literary sins of one's youth rising up to gibber against one after many years.

Anyhow, being one's own reader would bring only the satisfaction of regarding one's face in a mirror, which, even to feminine vanity, needs to be supplemented by some assurance that our attractions are not lost upon others. Oliver Wendell Holmes addresses as " Beloved " the one reader he assumes as sure not to get sleepy over his pages. " I suppose if any writer, of any distinguishable individuality, could look into the hearts of all his readers, he might very probably find in his parish of a thousand or a million, one who honestly preferred him to any other of his kind." So modestly puts it an author who might have counted his attentive congregation by myriads ; but were they drawn off to other pulpits, he would always have one faithful beloved in the present writer, who has so often decked these pages with feathers of his wit and wisdom. And the merest jay of us all may chance to find some responsive ear that takes our note for a nightingale's. I myself have had assurance from readers that they held me a very nonpareil for one or other flavour to their special taste. The

worst of it is that, on further inquiry, such warm admirers of mine usually turned out to be as little familiar with Shakespeare as with Homer, to prefer Mrs. Henry Wood to George Eliot, *Lalla Rookh* to *Paradise Lost*, or not to care for Oliver Wendell Holmes beyond such comic pieces as the *One Horse Shay* and *The Spectre Pig*. Once, by the way, in an effusion of after-dinner boldness, I took on me to tell that author of authors that his greatest lines were to be found in *The Chambered Nautilus*, and instead of being genially snubbed for my impertinence, had the satisfaction of hearing from him that he quite agreed with me.

I find myself closing upon the personal note struck in my first chapter. As a writer long practised in fiction, I am now going to call up that truly dear reader we all hope to secure ; and, taking him by the spiritual button-hole, to address to him a few words in conclusion, trusting that he at least will listen like a three-years child. I have tried to tell him what I know about authorship ; and the upshot of the matter is that, after all I have had to say against this calling, I would choose no other, were I starting again in life, albeit I might profit by experience to make a better start. *Si jeunesse savait ! si vieillesse pouvait !* When near the finish it is too late crying over all the milk spilt along one's rash career ; but at least one may do something in pointing out to others the pitfalls on the way to a goal more often desired than reached. Hoping to find readers among those who are or would be writers, I am now fain to end with some word of exhortation or encouragement for them ; and such a word I will borrow from an author who more than any other of our time earned richest reward in the love and praise of his peers.



There are just two reasons for the choice of any way of life : the first is inbred taste in the chooser ; the second some high utility in the industry selected. Literature, like any other art, is singularly interesting to the artist ; and, in a degree peculiar to itself among the arts, it is useful to mankind. These are the sufficient justifications for any young man or woman who adopts it as the business of his life. I shall not say much about the wages. A writer can live by his writing. If not so luxuriously as by other trades, then less luxuriously. The nature of the work he does all day will more affect his happiness than the quality of his dinner at night. Whatever be your calling, and however much it brings you in the year, you could still, you know, get more by cheating. We all suffer ourselves to be too much concerned about a little poverty ; but such considerations should not move us in the choice of that which is to be the business and justification of so great a portion of our lives ; and like the missionary, the patriot, or the philosopher, we should all choose that poor and brave career in which we can do the most and best for mankind. Now Nature, faithfully followed, proves herself a careful mother. A lad, for some liking to the jingle of words, betakes himself to letters for his life ; by-and-by, when he learns more gravity, he finds that he has chosen better than he knew ; that if he earns little, he is earning it amply ; that if he receives a small wage, he is in a position to do considerable services ; that it is in his power, in some small measure, to protect the oppressed and to defend the truth. So kindly is the world arranged, such great profit may arise from a small degree of human reliance on oneself, and such, in particular is the happy star of this trade of writing, that it should combine pleasure and profit to both parties, and be at once agreeable, like fiddling, and useful, like good preaching.

Another most successful author of our day offers a like good opinion of his craft.

If literature and occupation with letters were not its own reward, truly they who seem to succeed might envy those who fail. It is not wealth that they win, as fortunate men in other professions count wealth ; it is not rank and fashion that come to their call or come to call on them. Their success is to be let dwell with their own fancies, or with the imaginations of others far greater than themselves ; their success is their living in fantasy, a little remote from the hubbub and the contests of the world. At the best they

will be vexed by curious eyes and idle tongues, at the best they will die not rich in this world's goods, yet not unconsoled by friendships which they win among men and women whose faces they will never see. They may well be content, and thrice content, with their lot, yet it is not a lot which should provoke envy, nor be coveted by ambition.

To these good words of his dead schoolfellows, Louis Stevenson and Andrew Lang, the reader's humble servant would heartily say *Amen*. As a less successful author, I have been not a discontented one. With other tastes and temptations, I might have done otherwise with my time. I might have been a priest or parson to reverence some duck-pond as the boundless ocean of truth, as I was vainly taught to do by some that had the teaching of me. I might have been a lawyer to sharpen my wits for robbing the widow or orphan by clever making of black into white, by confusing of witnesses and bamboozling of juries. I might have been a doctor, and so better, yet perhaps to look back on some fatal mistake that buried its victim six feet underground instead of hanging him six feet above it. As a merchant, I might have gone about to starve or ruin my neighbour by some smart speculation or bold grab at monopoly. As a soldier, I might have more nobly slain Samaritans in my country's cause, without daring to ask were it right or wrong: the Samaritans might have slain me. I was half-bred to more than one honourable profession, but never cared to seek admission to any. For half a century I have been an author of sorts; and I never was anything else. I have laboured in my chosen vocation without much worldly profit, with no loss of esteem among those whose esteem I value, at some expense of health and ease such as every man incurs who makes himself useful to the world in a sedentary attitude. By

more than three-score years of dealing with written and printed pages I have worn out my eyes, like so many another bookman.

Round me too the night  
In ever-nearing circles weaves her shade.

This book of mine is, for once in a way, written chiefly for one appreciative reader—myself. It may be the last book I write, and if it were my last word, I cannot say that I am dissatisfied with a course of life against the drawbacks of which I have felt bound to warn the aspirant who may take it to be strewn with roses all the way. There is no rose, we know, without a thorn, but also the thorns go with roses. On coming to add up my account, I find a balance on the right side. I have lived my life; I have spoken my mind; I have done what I could, in a world where at the best we are all but unprofitable servants. By diligently plying the pen rather than the sword or the plough, one may have more surely helped to turn the wilderness of life into a garden. If one have taken pains not to let one's tool go rusty; if one have never prostituted it to base uses; if one have cared to be an honest hireling in this day-work; if one be aware of having given pleasure to some, of having sought to work harm to none, these are the things that should not make death terrible to an author who, like the silent many, must look to be forgotten; yet what good or ill he could do for his generation will not die in the lives of men.



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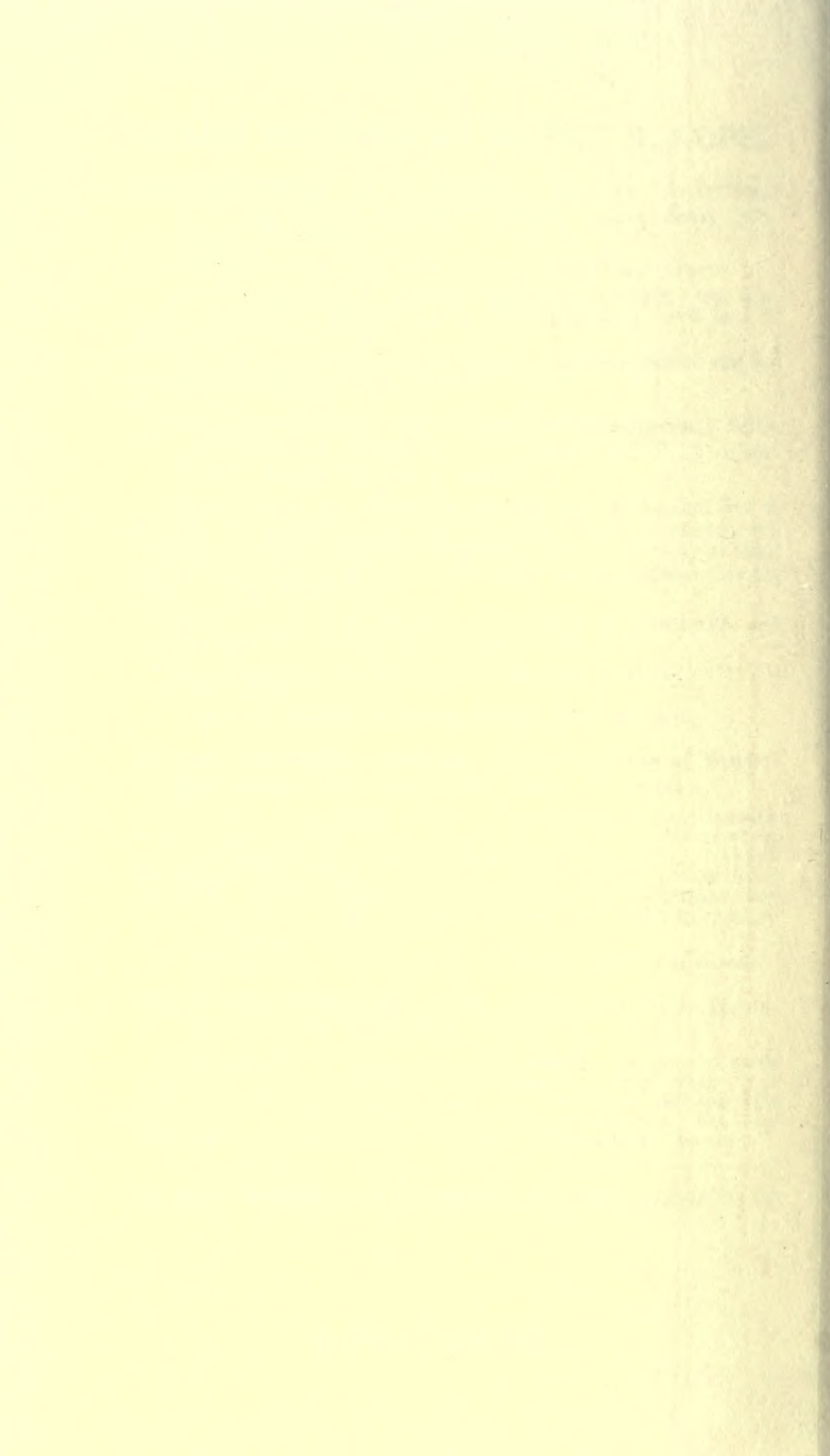
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